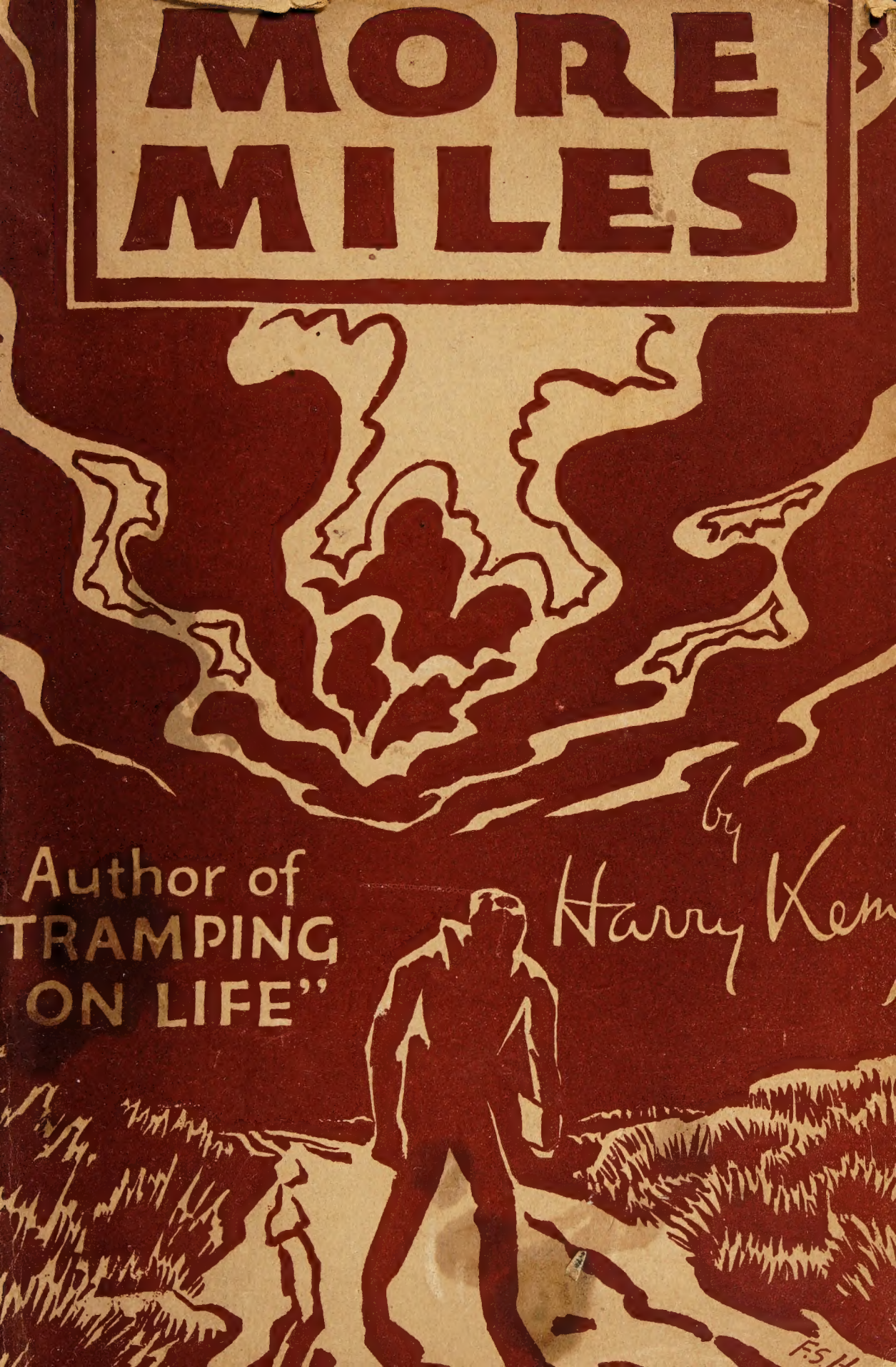
MORE MILES



by Harry Kem

Author of "TRAMPING ON LIFE"

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MORE MILES

by

Harry Kemp

MANY will read MORE MILES because they enjoyed the spirit and amazing candor of TRAMPING ON LIFE which went before it.

Many others will read MORE MILES because of the famous people in it—writers, editors, artists, journalists, millionaire radicals, rebels who served prison terms and exile.

But in the final showing, most will read it because it is the most essential book to the understanding of the freedoms of modern life ever written.

It is the source book of that great revolution in modern living and thinking that has silently taken place in the last ten yars. The influence of Greenwich Village and allied centers through the country, their trends in artistic and political thinking have been far greater than anybody could have prophecied — greater than the rebels themselves hoped.

Harry Kemp played a signal part in this life. His MORE MILES, tells the story of this powerful and misunderstood force in American life with stark authenticity, for it is itself a part of it.

(Continued on back flap)

More Miles

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MORE MILES

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

HARRY KEMP

AUTHOR OF

"TRAMPING ON LIFE"

BONI AND LIVERIGHT
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Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
Some said, It might do good; others said, No.

"Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress,"
Introductory Poem.

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More Miles

MORE MILES

I was caught, in the dead of a New Jersey shore winter, in a Summer cottage.

Absurdly enough, it somehow consoled me to learn from my neighbor and friend, Mrs. Rond, that, only a mile further up the road, stood a more substantial house, once occupied by Robert Louis Stevenson.

I imagined him—the shadow-thin novelist—propped up a-bed, in the midst of pillows of billowy whiteness, feverishly writing away . . the room stifling and deep-blue with a haze of smoke from successive cigarettes rapidly lit, each from the butt of the other . . every window closed tight as if hermetically sealed . . for him, as for me, an illimitable landscape of snow and snow-burdened pine. . .

. . . . . .

As I came back from a long trudge through the snow, to my cottage withdrawn in the pines——

"There's where the fellow lives that there was so much in the papers about."

"What fellow?"

"Don't you remember?—the poet that ran off with the wife of the fellow that writes books—Baxter I think HIS name was——

"Anyhow—the poet and the wife—seems like they didn't believe in marriage . . and, after the two of 'em had gallivanted about the country a bit, they landed down here, to try how living free together would pan out."

"And did it—pan out?"

"Not much! the stink that was raised everywhere was too much for the woman to stand—she gave up and ran off."

"But the fellow?"

"The poet? . . he's still hanging on."

"What? in there? in this cold weather? good Jesus!"

The two men that I had overheard sluffed on through the snow, still talking about me.

I had been standing behind a clump of pines, as motionless as any of them, jotting down lines of verse that the exhilaration of the walk had brought:

"Help me, Strength of Life, to burn clear for beautiful things,
Not in the old, corrupt, sick Puritan way. . .
Stand close to me, hand on shoulder, Strength of Life!"

It was thus that, unobserved, I had overheard their talk. . .

As I burst through the front door into my house, my ears tingled not alone from the nip of the savage cold, but from a final, obscene twist that the two men had given to their conversation as they moved out of hearing.

I went sick at the pit of my stomach to think that this was probably but a fair whiff of public opinion.

. . . . . .

Hildreth, Baxter's wife,—at every turn she rose up before me!

I came across things she had touched and used: her blue-checkered apron, frozen stiff, where she had stuffed it under the kitchen sink; her favorite cup, because it was the daintiest. . .

I realized, that, from now on, I could never again live for any length of time without the complete companionship of a woman.

I knew that my solitary, vagrant life of the Past would never again be possible for me.

My prolonged solitude, my suffering alone, there in my Summer cottage, had the same effect on me, that drowning has on a man who sees and recapitulates swiftly all his past life, before going down for the last time.

As in an absurd dream-cinema I saw over again everything I had ever done.

And always, as the recurring theme, came the vision of the affair that had just clattered about my ears in ruins:

"I've got to begin all over again . . I've got to begin all over again!"

I had fallen into the habit of talking out loud with myself. That was not good!

. . . . . .

I could see from my window how all the expanse of snow was sheeted over with a thin, shining glaze of ice.

The birds that lit on its mirrory surface slid about as if they had tiny skates on. I had to laugh at their antics, but I was sorry for them as they pecked and pecked away, trying to get through to the hidden ground to find something to eat.

I scattered crumbs out the back door for them, every morning . . for an increasing flock of them.

. . . . . .

And there, outside, was Mrs. Rond coming up my front path—one bitterest morning when the sun had just jumped up with a great, dazzling light that brought no heat with it, though it struck blindingly back from the snow as from a landscape composed of heaps of minute, broken glass.

As Mrs. Rond drew near she was setting her heels down in a decisive, masculine manner, to keep from slipping and falling.

She was lugging along with her the strangest burden—an armful of purring, trustful cats. . .

Her array of pet cats had as usual started out to go with her like dogs on her journey over the ice-glazed snow . . and she had stooped to scoop them up—rescuing them as they sprawled helplessly.

. . . . . .

"You can't shoo a cat back as you can a dog!"

Then—shivering and drawing the lapels of her man's coat closer——

"Good God, boy! some morning we'll find you frozen stiff, over here . . all alone"—with a glance about—"eating your meals out of tin cans—cold too!"

A half-finished can of baked beans stood close at hand, on the arm of a Morris chair. All the spoons being dirty, I had been eating the beans out of the can with a shoe horn.

On the seat of the same chair lay, face-downward, an open volume of Wordsworth. . .

I crouched close to the stove, in which the fire had gone out, while I was writing—wrapped up in a couple of blankets, like an Indian.

"I've tramped across through the woods, to bring you back home

with me. I just can't bear it any longer—to think of your staying on here, like this—in this hellish weather!"

She went on to the effect that she wanted me to come and live in her house, with the family, till the frightful, cold weather moderated.

"Wait till I gather up some of my books."

"You can come for them later on, when you've thawed out in civilized surroundings. Here! if you want to carry something, take a couple of cats!"

. . . . . .

I sat embracing a cup of steaming-hot coffee with my hands and fingers, to thaw the stiffness out of them, in the tramp's manner.

As Mrs. Rond's husband shambled in from the shed with a bucket of coal, he sent me a look curiously apprehensive.

"Mr. Gregory," explained Mrs. Rond decisively, "has come over —on my invitation—to stay with us while the cold snap lasts. I couldn't let him freeze to death; so I tramped across, just now, and brought him back with me."

Murmuring something inarticulate, Rond reached down his heavy alpaca coat from a kitchen nail and started townward, to his daily work in West Grove's General Store.

. . . . . .

During that last month of my stay at West Grove, at Mrs. Rond's, I took long walks alone, thinking matters over.

I thought and thought till all my thoughts stood out as keen as the sun-scattering sparkles in the crisp snow over which I was going.

Often Mrs. Rond joined me in my walks, blowing clouds of cigarette smoke from her nose, as if an inner combustion drove her along.

She smoked and rolled her own cigarettes deftly—from packages of Plowboy Tobacco—I swore to her if I ever wrote a famous book, I'd send her a case of Plowboy, on the proceeds of my first royalties. . .

At times Editha, Mrs. Rond's eldest daughter, joined me. . .

The heavy, woolen stockings she wore, when she went with me, made her seem warm and animal and desirable.

. . . . . .

One morning Mrs. Rond swept upstairs to me, where I sat writing. Her eyes were blazing in cold, blue fury.

At first I thought that fury aimed at me, and I shrank back guiltily, because of my hidden, unconfessed feelings toward Editha . . natural in any lonely man——

"Of all the impudence!" Mrs. Rond began, "the papers!" she exclaimed further, choking with indignation.

I went cold in my heart—from previous knowledge of what newspapers could do.

"Why, what's wrong—what have the papers done?"

"A reporter—a young fellow I know,—the local correspondent for a New York paper, had the impudence literally to step across my path this morning, while I was on my way back from the village —and ask me, point-blank, about—about you and Editha!

"The bounder had taken it for granted!—" Mrs. Rond choked with fresh indignation.

"Take WHAT for granted?"—though I knew well enough.

"That, as he put it bluntly—Editha was to become, or was already, your new 'affinity'—after Hildreth—you had been seen 'coming back from long walks together', as he phrased it; gossip was abroad, he said; and he had the brazenness to ask me—her mother and your friend—for a photo of her, to go with a story he'd already written, for the press."

. . . . . .

By tea-time, Mrs. Rond, Editha, the two other daughters, and I, were already making a jest of the story. . .

Having scotched the scandal at birth, Mrs. Rond was appeased.

But Rond himself, when he came home from work, took it in a graver and heavier spirit. He remained no longer inarticulate:

"Not that I have anything against you, Mr. Gregory,—but I knew that something like this would be started, sooner or later," murmuring his words in his gentle, valetudinarian manner.

. . . . . .

A crisp night of a multitude of stars. . .

Mrs. Rond and I had been down to West Grove's little public library, to which some classic-loving wag had quietly bequeathed his collection of early, unexpurgated English prose writers: all of Swift, Smollett, Fielding, Defoe . . even Aphra Behn and the Restoration

Dramatists . . such books being accepted sedately as classics by the ignorant, local Puritans who had not yet nosed out the robust matter contained in them. . .

"Mrs. Rond," I asked, as our feet the while crunched in step over the hard crust of snow—under my arm two volumes of the poetry of Swift—"Mrs. Rond, don't you think it about time for me to move on—somewhere else?"

The tall, clear-eyed woman stopped short. She looked me, level and keen, in the eyes.

"Look here, Johnny—there WAS no ground of truth in—in that young reporter's story, was there?"

I was doubly vexed: first, at the implied accusation of treachery to the fine woman's hospitality, and to tell the truth—*that there was no truth back of the story* . . for Editha was beautiful and young, and she had a fine, bright mind.

"Mrs. Rond—you ought to know, better than any one else——"

"It's a wise mother that knows her own daughter—these crazy times!"

"To be utterly frank, I must confess that Editha attracts me very much. Just as much as, I am sure, I do not attract her . . except on an intellectual plane—for, on our long walks, we've discussed——"

"It is that that my husband objects to most—your long walks together, and, most of all—to be frank in turn with you—to your probable discussions."

"And do you?"

"No—I do not!"

We went on in silence for the space of three glaring arc lights, along the abandoned sidewalks. Then I——

"Look here! I feel as if, now, I ought to move on somewhere else!"

"Nonsense—why let a bit of nasty, small-town gossip——?"

"I'd feel rather awkward—now—staying on——"

"If you have my husband in mind, Johnny—he's fundamentally a good sport . . and please don't think he doesn't like you—but——"

"O, no! I understand! . . and he's probably quite right in his uneasiness. I know well enough that, from now on, people—because of my notoriety——"

"Listen to me!" she fronted me again, stopping me in my progress—"I want you to believe that I've never in my life cared a damn what small-minded, ignorant people thought or said . . and you're welcome in MY household, even though West Grove's talking and gossiping—as long as you find it convenient to stay!" . .

. . . . . .

But, truth was, the vagrant impulse was upon me, and New York, with its great sky-line, was ever in my mental sight—New York, with its millions of people—New York, the scene and centre of American effort——

. . . . . .

I had written a new long play, another religious play, "The Brother of Jesus"—suggested by a poem of my own, that told how Joses, the brother of Jesus, could never understand the latter—Joses, type of all the stodgy, unimaginative men, to whom the Dreamer means nothing but foolishness.

This I would fetch to New York with me; and find a publisher, at least, for it . . but not an immediate producer; for it was a tragedy, and was cast in the form of blank verse: A mode in which Shakespeare and Stephen Phillips alone won contemporary dramatic presentation.

. . . . . .

Within the week, thanks to the arrival of a small check (it always was a small check) for a poem—I found myself skirting the grey salt marshes—stood on a ferry that surged across the Hudson through fields of broken ice,—the sky-backed mass of New York drawing closer to the fore——

. . . . . .

Pretentious Gramercy Square was scarcely forty steps away from the Hotel Grandon. The glitter of its oblong sign, a black board with gilt edges, led me to it. It stood up a side street, close to the Third Avenue Elevated.

Seeking out what I knew to be a literary and artistic center, I had first naïvely inquired for lodgings at places only prospering people could afford to live in, on Gramercy Square itself.

The gold-braided negro doormen had looked me haughtily up and down, wielding such scorn as only menials can convey—at the spectacle of me standing there, my huge bulging grip in my hand, my

rowdy cap that I wore when it rained, earing up out of my pocket . . my cheap, unpressed blue serge suit. . .

. . . . . .

"A room, and the cheapest you've got!"

At my words, a harmless-looking, peaceful-faced, squat Russian Jew peered up at me from behind the hotel desk.

He was a man easily over fifty, and he wore a derby, tight-settled upon his head till it forced his ears out from under the brim.

"I can ledt you haf a naice room, for t'ree dollars a veek."

. . . . . .

The room he showed me to was as clean as the holystoned and washed-down deck of a ship.

The lace curtains on the two large windows, though worn to threadbareness, were snow-white.

The turned-back sheets on the made bed were fragrant through cleanliness. I asked, nevertheless,—"have you got any bedbugs?"

The landlord took the question matter-of-factly.

"Nodt a von . . my vife—she take goot care of everyt'ing herselluf."

. . . . . .

There were large, old-fashioned chairs in the room, upholstered in worn, red plush. There was a washstand, with a crockery pitcher and bowl. . .

There was a large mirror—a grand antiquity, that you could see your whole self in.

Outside, the Elevated trains roared back and forth at rhythmic, ocean-like intervals.

I stood up in front of the mirror and inspected myself critically.

"Well, here you are, old boy, at last!" I spoke aloud to myself—"and New York is yours!"

. . . . . .

"Well, Johnny, what can I do for you?"

It was Jack Miles speaking, editor of *Manton's Magazine*.

He stood before me,—bluff, red-faced, square-built like an old-fashioned seaman.

He extended me a hearty handclasp and I felt the familiar lack of the right index finger. . .

"I've a couple of poems with me," I faltered.

"Still writing rhymes? You're incorrigible."

Jack Miles forte was rough kidding, but this time I sensitively considered his brusque geniality a method of waving me out . . other conservative magazines, and magazines not so conservative, would have none of me, because of my recent notoriety. Why should *Manton's* prove the exception?

"Yes, still incorrigibly writing rhymes," I echoed, my mouth pulling awry though I tried to control it. I started to go.

Miles made a grab for me, caught me by the shoulders. . .

"Come back here! Don't be so damned sensitive . . this is a new rôle for you to play!" He led me into his inner office——

"What's the use pretending, Jack?" I asked rather sadly, "it's decent of you, of course, to try and let me down easy, but——"

"What do you mean by 'pretending' and 'letting you down easy'?"

"Because of my notoriety—" I faltered.

"What the hell is it to me what your private life has been? You're only one of the fellows that got caught, that's all! Here, let me see your poems.

"Here," he made a snatch—avoiding the discussion—"let me see your poetry!"

"Yes!" after glancing my verse over—"I like two of these poems well enough to buy them for *Manton's*."

I rose, standing where I was.

"Where shall I send the check?"

"Jack, is it possible for you to put the check right through now?"

"Don't you realize there's such a thing in the world as regular business procedure—you poets'll drive me dippy yet."

"Frankly, I haven't a cent; I'm behind in my room-rent; and I——"

"All right, sit down a minute and I'll try to jam the check through. But be quiet—I've got a lot of work to plow through yet."

He sent his secretary into the cashier's office with a voucher.

Then, without rising from his swivel chair he shot me a copy of *Manton's*—the latest.

"You see that magazine?"

"Yes—" puzzled, not knowing what he was aiming at.

"Turn the pages over."

I obeyed, glancing cursorily through them, more puzzled, while

Miles, affecting to have forgotten my presence, busily rustled through the papers on his desk.

Finally he wheeled on me dramatically:

"Do you know what that magazine would be like, if I presumed to conduct an inquiry into the private lives of my contributors, before accepting work of them?"

I confessed I hadn't the slightest idea.

"Have you ever seen Elbert Hubbard's book on Silence?"

"It was a hoax. It was all blank pages."

"Exactly what *Manton's* would consist of, if what our people wrote was accepted or rejected according to their private lives.

"Not that they're not among the finest people in the world—otherwise they wouldn't be writing for *Manton's*," he boasted—"but—O, you get what I'm driving at . . what Hamlet said about treating each man according to his deserts, and who'd escape a whipping?"

In a less boisterous tone *Manton's* editor assured me that, until the rest of the magazines recovered from their moral flurry against me, he would buy one or two poems a week from me, and find place for them somewhere, in the numerous *Manton* publications. . .

"And now, get the devil out of here!" he shouted, in a final burst of feigned rudeness, in order to hide his friendly, emotional embarrassment.

. . . . . .

At *Manton's* usual rate of fifty cents a line, the check for the two poems totaled fourteen dollars.

That meant a considerable sum to me.

Around the corner on Third Avenue, was Beefsteak John's.

I could procure morning coffee and crullers there for five cents. And a "regular" dinner for fifteen—a course meal consisting of soup, a choice of meats, two vegetable side-dishes, dessert, and a cup of coffee.

Lunch I mostly skipped.

Laundry—I washed my own shirts and BVD's in the communal bathtub, letting the water run, and splashing noisily about, from time to time, to lead people to think I was bathing.

My clothes I dried by hanging them over chairs close to the open window. If, the next morning, they were a trifle damp, I put them on anyhow, trusting to the natural heat of my body to

complete the drying process. Beyond a few sneezes there'd follow no untoward result.

My total expenses per week amounted to:

Room-rent, $3.00; food, $1.40; seven breakfasts at five cents a-piece, and seven dinners at fifteen: total—$4.40.

When I needed to go anywhere, I walked, thus eliminating the item of car fare.

. . . . . .

My poverty rather forwarded than hindered the thriving of my mind. A Byron is more of a marvel, doing something worth while, amid all the distractions of life, than a Helen Keller, locked in a hushed darkness, whose one activity and incentive is,—to dig out!

The only books I could afford were the classics, which may be bought cheap at second-hand, whereas the books of the day may seldom be. . .

Along Fourth Avenue and along Twenty-third Street stood on the sidewalks stands of battered books for sale.

Many of the poets I found there, at five, ten, fifteen cents the copy . . soiled and marked, but typographically intact.

For ten cents I purchased the complete poetic works of Dryden in one dusty volume that smelt of fire and smoke.

I went without coffee and crullers for five mornings, and came into possession of a large Byron embellished with steel engravings. . .

The Latin and Greek classics were to be had cheap. . .

And there were to be picked up occasionally, rarely found poets: the works of Hogg, The Ettrick Shepherd; of Allan Ramsay; of Fergusson, for whom Burns cherished such high and fond regard.

Soon my room was heaped with dilapidated classics.

I became the hermit of a furnished room.

I learned to begrudge the brief period I must step outside the room, while it was being cleaned and the bed made.

"I'll stay here, and work alone, like this, till I have produced a great poem," I vowed.

. . . . . .

Directly across the street from The Grandon stood a Raines Law Hotel.

Dubious roomers crowded it all day, and at night every one of its windows blazed, conspicuous, with interior light . . in some of

the rooms guests forgot to draw the blinds; and, where the blinds were drawn, revealing shadowgraphs stood out against them . . a hundred silhouettes of drunken, amorous, commercialized sordidness.

But, in contrast—in a corner, down the corridor of our dark little hotel, sat a policeman, on rigorous "moral" guard.

"Dey're framink me up," Levine, my landlord, complainingly explained to me, in a soft, frightened voice—"adt lasdt dey sneaked py someone dat didn't register proper. . .

"Budt v'y shouldt I pay graft ven all I vant iss to run a decent place?"

. . . . . .

Walking along Fifth Avenue, I ran into Ruth, Penton Baxter's former secretary. I saw her before she saw me, and my impulse was to dodge into the crowd and not be recognized.

I had sworn that, no matter how lonely it grew for me, I would never look up any of the people who had been involved in what was called "The Baxter Affair."

But I was too late; in my moment of hesitation Ruth had spied me.

. . . . . .

"I'm secretary to a regular business man at present."

"—Like the change?"

"Not at all. . . It's dull . . I'd rather, much rather be a bit uneasy about where my salary's coming from, and find more of the unexpected and exciting cropping up from day to day!"

Ruth had to hurry back to work, her lunch hour being up.

"The hours are too fixed, too."

She gave me her address and asked me to come and see her soon.

When I reached my room, I tore up her card and cast it into the wastebasket. It was not that I did not like her. But I must stay by my severe resolve. . .

Then my resolution broke. I picked out the torn fragments of the card and pieced them together, putting them in between the leaves of my Shakespeare.

. . . . . .

Her morning's work finished, in the large, quiet parlor on the first floor of the Grandon the ample Mrs. Levine, the proprietor's wife, used to sit, of afternoons, knitting and sewing and darning . .

her wide lap maternally outspread, heaped with wool and needles. . .

While the needles clicked, I often sat reading opposite, at the center table, under the spell of her matriarchal quiet.

Once, looking up from her knitting, she informed me abruptly out of a hidden current of thought—

"Ve are goink to courdt about our case a veek from Saturday, Mr. Gregory. . ."

At this juncture Levine himself appeared, standing in the doorway, his derby crushed flat down over his ears, which stood out pink and lateral. . .

"Yess, Mr. Gregory," he put in, "ve are goink to courdt, undt ve vant dat you come undt be der vitness dat dis place iss nodt run as a disorderly house but as a decent place. . .

"I haf pudt too much money alreadty in de Grandon, andt it vould be a shame ve shouldt be made to kvit for vat ve do nodt do!"

. . . . . .

My sharked-up reason for visiting Ruth was that I'd like to have her judgment on "The Brother of Jesus"; my true reason was that I was beginning to suffer from the desperate loneliness that living, solitary, among crowds creates—more desperate than the loneliness of forests and plains. At first good for the creative mind, soon it devolves into a species of solitary confinement. . .

"My play, Ruth!"

First I read her the introductory poem—the argument of the work. . .

"Joses, the brother of Jesus, plodded from day to day,
With never a vision within him to glorify his clay;
Joses, the brother of Jesus, was one with the heavy clod,
But Christ was the soul of rapture, and soared, like a lark, with God.
Joses, the brother of Jesus, was only a worker in wood,
And he never could see the glory that Jesus, his brother, could.
'Why stays he not in the workshop?' he often used to complain,
Sawing the Lebanon cedar, imparting to woods their stain?
'Why must he go thus roaming, forsaking my father's trade,
While hammers are busily sounding, and there is gain to be made?'
Thus ran the mind of Joses, apt with plummet and rule,
And deeming whoever surpassed him either a knave or a fool,—

For he never walked with the prophets in God's great garden of bliss—
And of all the mistakes of the ages, the saddest, methinks, was this.
To have such a brother as Jesus, to speak with him day by day,
But never to catch the vision which glorified his clay."

"I've set the pace with that poem as introduction."

"Not so bad . . rough, but it possesses a certain crude vigor and feeling."

We sat reading the play together; I stopping ever so often to point out occasional felicities of expression unabashedly with "that's great" or "don't you think that shows genius?" as if the play were another's that I had just come upon, not my own.

"Bennett Whellen's the man for this," exclaimed Ruth, "He's the new young publisher . . the old-fashioned fellows won't be in it with him, when he gets going . . even Kennerley will have to look to it, not to be surpassed in discovering and helping out new genius!

"Whellen must see this, right away!"

It was late when I left, glad that I had gone to see Ruth and leaving the script with her for further critical scrutiny.

Accompanying me to the door——

"By the way, you can't possibly testify in behalf of your friendly landlord, Levine!"

"And why can't I?"

"All the old stuff will be raked up again:

" 'John Gregory, corespondent in the Baxter case and exponent of Free Love, discovered living in house of ill-repute'—that'll be the gist of what the papers will report."

"Let them——"

"—and, instead of helping Levine, it would have the contrary effect—your testimony!"

. . . . . .

Next morning, getting up early—a strong smell like freshly grated horseradish stung in my nostrils.

Levine came running, panic-stricken, up the stairs.

I went with him, up still another flight.

We halted before the locked door of one of his cheapest rooms, nosing our way to where the strongest reek entered.

He stooped, peeking.

"—can't see anything. Key must be turnedt on de insidt."

After jiggling with the master-key, he succeeded in sending the other key clanking to the floor, in flinging the door open.

Strangling fumes rushed out upon us.

Levine downed on all fours and crept into the room. I followed, stooping low and coughing.

Levine rose up under the streaming jet and turned the gas off.

. . . . . .

The young Swede roomer had done a complete job—tearing the sheets into minute strips and stuffing every crack and interstice of door and window.

He had drawn a blanket over himself, after he had turned on the gas.

The body lay along the bed, covered with the blanket except for the grotesque stiffened feet that stuck out naked. The face was covered, but a wisp of straw-blond hair stuck forth, hay-like.

He had gone to bed in his underclothes.

He had evidently worked half the night with deliberation to make the room air-tight; turned on the gas, then,—lying down for a last night's sleep.

He wouldn't need to look for jobs any more. . .

"If he vanted to dei so badt, vy didn't he go andt jump, nice and clean, into de East River, andt nodt bring all dis mess on us?" wailed Mrs. Levine.

Levine, apologetically—"my vife, she iss nodt hard, Mr. Gregory, budt ve are dis time havink already so much trouble, beside!"

"Yes, Mr. Levine, I understand—the next thing to do is to call a cop right away!"

"Call a cop?" he looked worried.

"Yes, and leave the body undisturbed where it is till the Law takes charge."

"Poor boy!" Levine lamented, gently and grotesquely oscillating his head, the tight derby, a part of it, still on—"if the poor boy hadt only told me—I am human, Mr. Gregory—I vould haf given him money eefen!"

"Idt vould be better, far better, if ve had staydt in our tailor shop in de Bronx," wailed Mrs. Levine, dolefully rocking her body.

After what I had seen, I lost my appetite for coffee and crullers, that morning.

. . . . . .

When I called to see Ruth and receive my play back, apologetically she confessed she had herself taken it around to Bennett Whellen, whom she knew through Baxter——

"It has great literary merit. You need the notice it will bring you. It will counteract the other impression you've given people—of being a mere sensationalist."

"*I'VE given?*—the newspapers, you mean!"

"It couldn't have been ALL the newspapers' doing."

. . . . . .

Impetuously I hurried to see Whellen.

I was told he was not in, though, from Ruth's description of him, I could have sworn I had seen him walking across the back of his combination bookstore and publisher's office. Later, when I met him, I was sure it had been he. . .

Soon I received a friendly note from him, asking me to call and see him in regard to "The Brother of Jesus."

. . . . . .

Whellen cordially received me—teetering there on the edge of his chair, left ankle supplely brought high and crossed over the thigh of his right leg, like the Degas picture of the ballet girl resting.

The stocky, blue-eyed publisher wore a fresh carnation in the lapel of his coat. There was no steam on in his private office. He sat there, dressed in an ordinary business suit, all the windows wide open, top and bottom, that bitterly cold Winter's day.

Frigid winds rode in gales about the room.

A multitude of paper-weights held down various heaps of manuscript from whisking here and yon . . manuscripts . . there were manuscripts everywhere untidily littering chairs, tables, the top of a bookcase, his desk.

Yes, he had accepted "The Brother of Jesus." . .

"If the day ever arrives when the censors allow Christ and his brothers and apostles on the stage, you and I will make a lot of money."

He extended me a white, well-manicured hand in dapper, fastidious farewell.

As I went out at the door, an extra burst of wind occasioned by the draft so admitted, seemed to whirl Whellen like a weathercock, face about, to his desk again.

. . . . . .

There was another man visiting Ruth.

"Comrade Pomfret, this is Comrade Gregory!"

Though I had no call for jealousy, no claim upon Ruth,—an inner fury rose in me against the man. . .

On my arrival at her place, this evening,—seeing her windows agleam with mellow light about the edges of drawn blinds, I had leaned over and tapped intimately on the window. . .

"You frightened me, tapping on the glass," she commented, in a low voice . . coming, after a long wait, to the door—"is anything wrong?"

"—the usual predicament, Ruth!"

"Try and be patient till I've shooed my visitor off."

When Pomfret had at last crushed his soft, felt hat down over his mass of salt-grey hair, and had bidden me good-by with a light of gentle, talkative intellectuality shining in his face. . . I did not rise from the couch, but sat on, reading in a book I had casually and insolently lifted to my face. . .

"You took him all the way out to the steps!" I blurted, fretful from hunger and jealousy, "and then you stood, talking——"

"What right have you to dictate to me?"

Ignoring her angry question——

"All he was trying to do was to out-stay me . . talking on and on about the pragmatism of William James."

"O, Johnny, don't!" Ruth's voice broke—"since last Summer, down at our little colony of Eden, something fine has been dulled that was in you . . in some ways you've not stood the test."

She started to cry. She cried into the Spanish omelet she was preparing.

She looked like some silly, noble sheep.

"Where did you meet that fellow—that pretended to know so much about socialism and philosophy?" I nagged childishly.

"He's a friend I found up at the Fernando School; you ought to go to Fernando Center and strike up an acquaintanceship with a few people, instead of moping about alone. It's not good for you,

Johnny, you'd write better and behave less irritably, if you'd cultivate a few friends."

. . . . . .

Ruth's suggestion took hold of me, and, from desiring to be alone, till I had derived great poetry from my bitter solitude, I now desired, caught in a social panic, to seek out every one I had formerly known who was at present in the City. . .

To begin with—there was Ally Merton, who had been my schoolmate and self-appointed mentor back at Laurel University, in Kansas.

He who had striven to teach me the importance of observing the punctilios of better social behavior—of dressing less laxly than I did.

I remembered that he had come to New York, strongly recommended by Jarvis Alexander Mackworth, the Kansas Novelist—to do rather well, from the start, on a conservative newspaper.

When I reached Ally by 'phone he readily invited me up to dinner at the Phi Nu Fraternity House, on Morningside Heights.

Ally was one of a group of older young men there, who, though out of college several years, clung to the fraternity habit, living at the local chapter house of the fraternity to which they belonged, while they journeyed to daily business downtown,—in Wall Street, in the offices of the newspapers, and in the various banking and commercial houses.

It was the same Merton that I discovered, meticulous as ever as to points of decorum, and at the right clock-tick in the matter of clothes.

There were the to-be-expected healthy, well-dressed boys, standing about the piano, singing popular airs and college songs, while one of them accompanied; lounging in easy chairs; lazily knocking ivory balls about on tables covered with green baize.

I remembered back to the time when, after I had had two poems in *The Century*, back at Laurel,—the Phi Nus had started languidly "rushing" me, to drop the procedure because either my views of life were too radical, or because it was dubious which way I would jump in after life—whether I would be a credit to the Phi Nus or not.

. . . . . .

To my surprise the boys gave me the reception of a person of distinction—not because of any considerable bulk of poems of mine that had appeared in the current periodicals, nor because of the recent announcement of the forthcoming publication of my play "The Brother of Jesus," but because of my having been a matter of spectacular notice in the Press.

. . . . . .

Melodiously the gong sounded for dinner.

At the table I delivered a long harangue against marriage.

After we left the table we continued the argument in heated discussion up to midnight.

We had no idea of the continuous racket we had been raising.

Glancing down into the street from the front window, we saw a crowd gathered there, looking up.

. . . . . .

"Good-by, Gregory, old chap!"

"Ally, have Mr. Gregory up often, won't you!" Ally leading me up to his room for a heart-to-heart talk. . .

"You've pulled some pretty frank stuff, this evening, and you seem to get away with it, just as you used to do back in college. . .

"—Didn't think these boys would like it—you laid it on raw and thick—evidently they did like it . . guess it's a way you have. . .

"All I know is, I couldn't get away with a third of the stuff you pull."

While Merton was delivering this monologue with an air of self-satisfaction and considerable amusement—it seemed that showing me off brought, in his estimation, glory to himself—he was searching through his closet where hung lines of trousers and coats on holder and rack.

Tenderly, lovingly he lifted down a complete suit of blue serge, in prime condition.

"Johnny, here's a suit for you . . it'll prove a trifle short in the sleeves and legs, but you can find some tailor who'll fix that up for a couple of dollars—and" he pressed a five dollar bill into my hand—"here's the couple of dollars."

"You're leaving the vest behind."

"I never wear vests."

"One of the last injunctions," laying his hand on my shoulder,

"Jarve Mackworth gave me, before I left for New York, was to keep an eye on you in case you started running in circles, instead of spirals—around and around like a puppy after his tail; 'let him run around all he will; if it's the spiral that leads upward, not the circle, that wins nowhere'."

"Good old Hick philosophy, isn't it? . . but Jarve Mackworth's all right, anyhow. He *means* his 'R. F. D. philosophy' that's more than many of his contemporaries do."

"Don't be severe on a good friend, Johnny . . glad you 'phoned me. Keep in touch with me!"

. . . . . .

People's worst weakness was clinging to other people with whom they had lived through a vital crisis. The crisis over, one should go on to others, who had something fresh and unknown to give . . especially should this rule apply to the artist. . .

But, seeing Ruth again, and hearing that Darrie was in town, I must needs dig up Darrie.

Darrie was the friend of Hildreth's from Kentucky, who, on a visit to her in Eden when Hildreth and I fell in love—had faithfully stood by all of us during our subsequent trouble . . had stood in impartial friendship—not only by us, but by poor, confused Penton.

. . . . . .

Darrie, settled in an uptown apartment, was at work on her "Life of Winnie Davis" . . .

"It's not creative work like Penton's and yours. It's a biography—a "Life of Winnie Davis" I'm writing," Darrie explained, deprecating.

"Who the devil is—or was—Winnie Davis." I asked, rhetorically.

"The daughter of the First and Last President of The Confederacy," she soberly replied.

"But, Darrie, what did she ever do, to warrant putting her life between the covers of a book?"

"Just because she was the daughter of Jefferson Davis is enough to make her life an affair of vivid interest not only to me, but to several thousand other Daughters of The Confederacy," returned Darrie, bridling.

. . . . . .

She had been staying at The Martha Washington when I had first looked her up. When I asked why she was staying there, I learned that, in company with Penton she had been riding about in a borrowed car, and Penton, being a poor driver, had run down an Italian fruit peddler, who, seriously injured, was conveyed to the hospital . . then again the newspapers . . which in reporting the accident, had slipped in an allusion to "a mysterious, good-looking woman" who had been the other occupant of the car. . .

"But Penton managed to keep who I was, a secret."

"I see—'the other woman in the case'!"

"That's what they might have inferred."

To escape the reporters, Darrie had at once given up her apartment and run to the Martha Washington. The Martha Washington, tenanted only by women, was a safe place and beyond taint of gossip.

The scare over, to make doubly sure, she was taking another apartment further uptown. . .

"You people seem to like it—but as for me, I can never be too chary of reporters." But immediately after—"You must come up to see me soon—as soon as I get settled. I've still got almost a trunkful of old papers full of stories about you and Penton and Hildreth." Her eyes gleamed in vivid, vicarious enjoyment.

. . . . . .

I tried hard to explain to Levine just why I would not prove a good witness for him. But the old man had not acquired the habit of reading the daily papers. It bewildered and puzzled him. He acted hurt for a time.

. . . . . .

I was on my way out, passing the hotel desk, when Levine stopped me. I was behind for three weeks' rent. But it was not because of that that he stopped me. He sought to help me out, by giving me the job of night-clerk.

I wouldn't have much to do, he explained, but to be discreet about how lodgers signed on the book. The rest of the time I might sit and write and read. He would give me room-rent free, and ten dollars besides, a week. His wife was worried over my thinness. She was sure I was not getting enough to eat. I refused the job.

. . . . . .

A curiosity possessed me to learn the present situation of each of my former friends. Hildreth I had heard was back home with her father and mother, happy as her restlessness would allow her to be, with a maid to wait upon her, luxury at her elbow. . .

Penton Baxter, leaving his son with his mother, had stranded himself out in the country, in a house the radical and wealthy Strallers were letting him have rent-free while he labored on another book for the salvaging of a wrecked humanity. . .

Darrie was ensconced in her new apartment resisting the efforts of her family,—now cajoling, now threatening,—to bring her back home to the moral certainties of Kentucky.

I would come upon her, writing in her cursive, elegant script that resembled fine steel engraving . . drinking cup after cup of Washington prepared coffee, villainously strong . . her eyes feverishly bright, the pupils of them intense and black through caffeine stimulation.

. . . . . .

"Not to-day," she said, "I can't see you to-day.

"I'm expecting Penton in from the country, and he mustn't find you here."

"I'll go down the back fire escape and out through the basement, if he comes——"

We were reading Veblen's "Theory of The Leisure Class" aloud together.

"Though why the devil," I continued, "when there's nothing between you and me—serious . . and, when it's none of his affair!——"

"You've given him such trouble already, that he has a complex against you."

"Darrie, could it be that you are in love with him?"

"He's such an Assisian simpleton, Johnny,—I wouldn't hurt him for the world!" . .

"The poor little chap—out there in the country—in the house the Strallers are letting him camp in——"

She related an amusing anecdote story of Baxter's "Assisian simplicity":

To keep the country wet and slush from soaking through shoes, he had assiduously rubbed goose grease into them.

Coming in to town to pay her a visit, he decided he must have a shine, make himself more presentable.

One of the Italian bootblacks at the Grand Central rubbed and rubbed, polished and polished, without result. Finally Baxter offered him fifty cents for the shine that wouldn't appear.

The bootblack flew into a regular Latin rage when he learned from Baxter that the latter had been rubbing goose grease into the leather. He accused Baxter of deliberately trying to play a joke on him.

Darrie was between laughter, and tears of compassion. Finally we both laughed long and loud, but not unsympathetically.

"Darrie, can't you see . . a woman need never worry about me. My simplicity is wise like the Biblical serpent. But Baxter—he needs a woman to be concerned for him, as a small boy needs a mother."

. . . . . .

I came upon Darrie, one day, surprising her. I had come in the morning, I generally waited till the afternoon, after I had done a morning's writing.

Finding the door of her apartment ajar, I simply walked in upon her—to discover her busily packing all her effects in her trunks . . heaps of fluffy clothes lay about.

She brought her head up quickly from an open trunk she had been stooping over. She was in morning negligée. She flushed over face, neck, shoulders.

"So you were running away, Darrie, without letting me know, or saying a word of good-by!"

She sat back in a chair, visibly distressed.

"I would have written to you!"

She wept, overwrought.

. . . . . .

When, several days later, I learned from Ruth that Penton Baxter had unexpectedly made off for Europe, there was no need to inform me that Darrie had followed, on the next steamer.

Baxter had gone to Holland, where his divorce, denied him in New York, could be decently gained by mutual consent of the parties involved, after a six months' residence.

"But I'm hurt to the point of insult, Ruth . . for Darrie pretended to be my friend, to trust me!"

"Now look here, I don't blame her for what she did. She was and is your friend. But she also knew pretty well your loquacity, and your sense of mischief—and the fact that Ally Merton and several other newspaper men are chums of yours. . .

"I think they've reached the happy end of the story—Baxter has found The Right Woman at last!"

"If there is such a thing as The Right Woman," I observed, with a groan. . .

"Why, you poor kid!" Ruth cried, coming over to me, surprised.

. . . . . .

Ruth took me up to the Fernando School, or Fernando Center, as it was also called.

There I met Emma Silverman again . . the anarchist leader.

I had become friendly with her, several years before, when she dropped off at Laurel, to fill a lecture engagement.

I had espoused her cause before the students, and in the face of the Faculty. . .

"Comrade Gregory, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, being in New York, and neglecting the bunch."

Drawing me apart, she invited me to a reception to be given, Saturday week, for Mack Alexander. . .

Mack Alexander was the man who had attempted the assassination of the steel Magnate, Franklin, during the Homestead strike.

Alexander had failed in the attempt; he was sent up for twenty years of which he served fourteen.

. . . . . .

The guests gathered in Emma Silverman's apartment were buzzing with excitement, as I stepped in.

"By God!" I heard Miss Silverman exclaim, "I'll call the police, that's what I'll do," swinging the great beam of her arm in accompanying, indignant gesture.

The night previous, while she had been up on her farm near Croton, the apartment had been burglarized.

She had just begun missing things.

But before she had taken three steps toward the telephone, she

stopped short at the inherent absurdity of her threatened line of action . . she, who did not believe in police, jails, punishment!

She led in the general laugh on herself.

"If the poor devil who robbed me, needs what he took more than I do, he's welcome to it. . . I nearly behaved like a Bourgeois!"

. . . . . .

The group of assembled anarchists gathered about him, looking up to him as a hero and martyr for "The Cause," Mack Alexander stood, seemingly dazed, from his recent prison experiences. . .

Mixture of doctor and priest, there lurked a kind of lascivious benevolence in his friendly smile . . he was smooth shaven, except for a tiny well-groomed moustache . . he wore gold-rimmed eyeglasses rather daintily.

Jack Leitman, Emma's sweetheart, and manager of her lecture tours, was there, too. Sloppily dressed, but in expensive clothes . . wearing a large, flowing Roycroft tie . . a soft-collared white shirt.

Leitman was growing flabby-fat, in spite of his youngness, though still handsome in a certain, slack way.

. . . . . .

With a tin dipper, tumblers were filled and refilled from a huge, foamy pail of beer.

Glass of beer in hand, I strolled from group to group . . making new acquaintances, renewing old, when I came upon the picture of a remarkably beautiful dark girl, leaning against the wall on the mantelpiece. . . "To our beloved Leader Emma" was written across it, in careful yet flowing script. Taken in the full sunlight, with a bank of foliage behind her . . her middy blouse open at the neck to the full division of her breasts . . the girl was smiling confidently into the sun. A dimple sat in either cheek.

"God, what a beauty!"

I sought out Emma immediately.

Trying to manage my inquiry adroitly and casually, after conversing obviously about everything else, more obviously I asked who the girl of the picture was.

"Opal Samuels . . haven't you heard of her? . . wait till you see her. She's beautiful, and a loyal worker for the Cause."

"Will—will she be here tonight?" I asked eagerly.

"She ought to be here by now."

. . . . . .

"Comrade Samuels, this is Comrade Gegory!"—Emma was introducing.

Mack Alexander, standing close by, watched me with a quick, interested gleam through his priestly glasses. . .

"Falling in love,"—the phrase was most apt.

It was as if I saw a marvellous face smiling down upon me through a confused welter and roar of waters under which I was rapidly falling, not gradually sinking. "Love at first sight" was happening to me. . .

"You're in the Movement, Comrade, of course?" I was religiously asked.

"No . . yes . . no . . that is—" I stammered, holding my glass sidewise, and spilling the top of the beer—"that is—not as actively as I'd—I might be—like Mack Alexander, or Emma, or 'Big Joe' Oakman." I was scrupulous not to add Leitman's name. He was at my elbow, grinning, interested in what was happening to me.

Emma, noticing how I floundered, put in "—Johnny's only a poet"—trying to make things right for me—"only a poet, but he might do great work for the Cause, in his way, if he *would* . . with some one to spur him on!"

Emma tactfully moved off, leaving us alone. Alexander, and even Leitman, tardily followed.

Opal sat down in a large chair, I perched on the arm.

She smiled intimately up at me.

I seemed to be dissolving into nothing.

All the room could see how dead gone on the girl I was.

I maneuvered desperately to leave at the same time Opal Samuels did.

On the way out, she acceded to my lame, pitiful request to be allowed to see her home.

Burning with sacrificial joy, I tried to hire a taxi to take her where she lived, on Grand Street, though I had only two dollars, and would be left without a cent for the next day.

"Don't be foolish—I won't let you waste your money."

She peremptorily vetoed the taxi.

"We'll ride on the street car."

Even then she insisted on paying for herself.

"But aren't you being dragged out of your way?"—again—"This seeing a woman home's all foolishness."—once more—"where do you live, answer me!" for I was sitting dazed, beside her.

Eagerly and obviously I gave her the street, and the exact number of the house.

She could not control a brief smile. . .

"You get off soon," she all but shook me, to rouse me from fixedly watching her face, "and please don't stare at me—everybody in the car's noticing us."

"I'm—I'm taking you all the way home!"

"That's not necessary."

Determined, she pressed the button for my street.

I stepped down and off into general space, still dazed.

The conductor, reaching, violently jerked me back. A heavy mail truck roared by, close.

"Look out, young feller, or they'll be pickin' ye up in pieces."

I had the satisfaction, in a last backward glimpse, of seeing that Opal's face was pale with fright over my narrow escape. At least she had that much emotion for me——

I spent the rest of the night writing poems to her. Every hour, idiotically, mailing another letter, accompanied by a rhyme, to her . . idiotically, because I was aware that such fantastic, headlong behavior would drive her off, instead of winning her nearer regard. . a frenzy in me compelled me to violate my better judgment. I felt weak. I trembled all over.

Several days went by, and I grew sicker of heart than ever—for not an answering letter came. Still I poured out my deluge of adoring verse.

Cajoling, wheedling, praising, upbraiding—writing again begging a humble pardon—affirming that I breathed with her breath, lived upon her heart beat . . all this, to a woman I had only met once!

I couldn't help myself, though I knew the heat of my crazed pursuit was having the opposite effect to that I sought. I hurtled on, with relays of passionate, crazed letters and crazier poems.

Speaking in the humblest terms of myself . . then exalting myself

to the heights of the heroic . . I would become the greatest American poet, and she would be sorry, if she did't have me!

. . . . . .

I walked up and down and about and around the City. I forgot to eat, slept by fits. I lost weight that I could not spare from my meager frame.

At last a letter came:—

"My dear Boy:—

"Thanks for your many verses. Of course, all these extravagant things you write are not in the least true about me. They wouldn't be, about the greatest woman in the world; you know that, and ought not to write them . . a poet's license, I suppose.

"The point I would make, is, why devote all this heap of words to a person of insignificance, like me—when you might serve the Cause, loyally, with your undoubted literary ability? . . which would really impress me in your favor.

"As to seeing me soon,—dear boy, that will be out of the question, as I'm going to Boston in a few days to take the place of a Comrade who works in a hair-dressing establishment—while she's off doing some organizing for our Union.

"Yours, sincerely,

"Opal.

"P. S. I bet you never guessed before I made my living at such an unromantic occupation as that of hair-dresser."

Good-looking women that I passed on the street had no more effect on me than shadows. I no longer turned to look at them wistfully.

The glorious red-headed woman that I constantly dreamed of possessing—she receded far back in my vision. . .

And that French girl with whom I would live, on the heights of the Montmartre . . she departed forever.

Instead, I saw myself writing great revolutionary poems, dedicated to Opal.

The Laon and Cythna of the Workers' Armageddon—at Capitalism's last defeat, I saw myself holding the barricades with Opal by my side . . her great cloud of black hair streaming on the wind like a banner. . .

. . . . . .

In my frenzy over Opal I had neglected seeing the good, kind, friendly Ruth.

I came upon Ruth, in turn, packing up to go away. She didn't possess, as Darrie did, three or four magnificent trunks, in some of which clothes could be hung in rows and kept neat. . .

She was moving about in a clutter of boxes, packed tight with books . . and one small trunk for her clothes.

She met me straightway with—"where have *you* been all these days?"

I murmured some excuse. I forget what.

"I've a lot of packing to do. I'm afraid you won't find me good company."

I sat silent, melancholy.

She proceeded with her packing.

After a while she explained——

"I've left my bourgeois business man."

"Can't I help you—pack?"

"No, you wouldn't know where things went—you'd only be in the way."

"I'll sit here and read in your Little Flowers Of Saint Francis till you're through."

"I'm afraid I'll still be busy. I've a lot of letters I must get off this evening."

"You're going to take time off to eat, aren't you?"

"I—I have an engagement for dinner," she answered, faltering . . incapable of lying, a slow blush suffused her honest, broad, virginal face. . .

"Ruth—don't you realize how fond I am of you? . . how much I need your friendship?"

"—Fond of me?—need my friendship?—yes, like the stray cat that has adopted three or four families at once, and goes around to each in turn for its accustomed saucer of milk . . and when he fails to find it at one place, trots off to the other door——

"I'm just one of your saucers of milk!"

Then she forgot her anger and pique at me, in the discovery of my more than usually meager appearance . . was all sympathy and pity.

. . . . . .

Ruth's new job was to be that of secretary to the well-known New England millionaire exponent of The Single Tax—Raymond Didier.

Didier's dream was to found a Single Tax colony built along the lines of Fairhope, in Alabama, of Arden, in Delaware—dedicating to the project part of his vast estate that lay back in the lake-scattered hills and uplands of Northwestern Massachusetts. . .

I saw Ruth off, at the Grand Central.

She kissed me a fond, sisterly good-by.

"Don't do anything foolish, now that you're having me around no longer, to advise you."

She'd have me up on a visit, soon as she could arrange it.

I've a great deal to tell you, about yourself," was her cryptic farewell.

. . . . . .

"Vell, idt iss just as goodt dot you didn't take dat shob uf nighdt clerk from me. . .

"Idt iss too much, all dis corrupdt dealings . . I go back to my tailor business in de Bronx . . vere I make suits again und hef a chance to be a decendt man."

Levine heaved a sigh of moral relief.

"Budt you musdt come undt see us, vonce in a vhile, Mr. Gregory . . andt somptime my husbandt he make a suit for you."

The furniture vans were backing up; the Levines were moving out every stick they owned.

Already their successor, the new landlord, was moving about.

I was behind in my rent—worried.

"Idt iss nodt dat you haf to leave, too," Levine assured me, under his breath, "Ve haf pudt you down on de book dat you hef paidt two veeks aheadt!"

When I protested half-heartedly.

"Vy nodt! Idt vill cost us noding," Mrs. Levine exclaimed, chuckling over a bit of sharpness practiced in behalf of a young man they unaccountably liked.

. . . . . .

I nearly perished with joy.

Opal was back from Boston, and she would see me—would have dinner with me, at Maria's. . .

We were walking along together.

I was complaining to her, of her hardness of heart—

"—You scared me, writing me such crazy letters. . .

"Don't take hold of my arm, in the middle of the street, I don't like it, it makes me nervous."

I had been touching her elbow, to help her through the traffic, crossing the street. Merely touching her sleeve sent a shiver of pleasure through me.

Jack Miles had just bought an extra poem of me. Proudly, the dinner was my treat. It was one of the poems written to Opal that I had sold. . .

"I don't drink, because I don't like it."

Nor would she let me order a bottle of the red wine I loved, for myself.

"But Opal, all the bunch drinks—Emma and Mack and the rest——"

"That's a part of the business I don't like . . I don't like their swilling their beer and 'red ink'—somehow it seems to detract from the Ideal we share. When people drink, they lose their self-control. I hate people who lose their self-control.

"I don't care what you do, when you're not with me—but, when you're with me, I don't want you to drink."

Her dainty nostrils flared commandingly.

It pleased me to have her force her will on me. It pleased her mightily.

The great mass of night-black hair was toppling over; she was placing it back with two pretty hands. . .

. . . . . .

Opal Samuels was making an inquisition into my life. She was pinning me remorselessly down to practicalities. . .

"You mean," she was asking, with moral shock in her voice, "that you're in such a bad economic predicament that often you can't tell where your next meal's coming from?—a man of your ability?"

"Yes . . often!" I replied, rather proudly.

"Listen to me, boy!" in her young, practical eagerness she called be "boy" . . "if I were in your place, I'd get a temporary job at something or other . . anything . . save up . . after that, do my writing—independent."

"Opal, writing's not done that way. You can't say: 'I'll work six months, and then, I'll do nothing but write six months.' That is, a hack can, but a genius can't. . .

"It isn't as if I haven't worked—I have—at every kind of manual labor . . but right at this period of my life I need all my time for studying, reading, writing. . .

"My Fame is beckoning me on, just in front of my nose. I can't turn aside, now, of all times!"

Unimpressed—"How about work on a newspaper—reporting? I should think——"

"No," I was sincere and insincere both—"no, there have been times when I've let my body out to the System, but I've never, and will never,—if I starve—hire out my brains to IT."

My statement struck home; I had foreseen it would.

She let me reach across and take her slender fiery hand in mine . . across the table cloth rusty with old wine-stains. . .

"—Opal, I need you . . you must come and live with me, or I shall die."

I should not have said the last word. It offended her practical sense of fitness.

"Die?—say you need me, ALL RIGHT! . . but don't use such a silly word as 'die'."

"People do die for love!" I bent over and clumsily pressed my lips to her hand . . "but, dear, come and live with me, and——"

"And chuck my good hair-dressing job that I've got here in the City?"

"We could rent a cottage out at Liberty Lands, Henry Colton's colony over in New Jersey. . .

"If you'd be my sweetheart, that would inspire me more than anything else in the world. . .

"I could turn my hand to writing short stories, tramp stories after the manner of Gorky and London . . eventually I'd have plenty of money."

"I can support myself . . what you could make means nothing to me . . besides, in a few years, The Revolution——"

"I'm running out to Liberty Lands this Sunday to see about a cottage."

Opal sat silent, musing.

The waiter, knowing me, started to bring me a bottle of wine. I signed to him not to. . .

"Opal, what are you thinking about?"

She turned to me, a flash of defiance in her somber eyes.

"Johnny, tell me, what do you think of the Jews? have you any race prejudice?"

"What a question to ask of a man who does any thinking."

"It's a pertinent question."

"I'd rather die than be so ignorant as to have prejudice against any racial group, Jew, Irish, Scotch, German, American, Negro—I'm often in doubt about economic problems. I never doubt, in this case."

"Good! I'm rather proud of my People . . I'm not one of your Jews that pretends he isn't a Jew." . .

"In a week, I'll have a cottage——"

"Remember, I'm promising nothing . . if you'd only work seriously for the Revolution, Johnny."

My unaccountable tendency to horseplay broke out . . through sheer joy over her considering me as a possible mate. . .

"Sure—If you say so, I'll sign myself 'yours for the Revolution' to every letter I write—like Jack London."

"There you go . . playing horse again," she gave my hand a playful, disconsolate pat. She rose and pinned on her hat. "Why are you such a fool?"

. . . . . .

I felt at home, at the Grandon, when Levine was landlord.

But, after the first few days of his absence—the place, lacking the assiduous tidying hands of Mrs. Levine, began to lapse into tawdriness; a breath of staleness settled down over the rooms and the large parlor; a musty smell descended on the corridors.

The new proprietor was a great-bellied, flatulent creature. . .

"The God-damned Kike," he would say, speaking of Levine, "he might 'a' made a reg'lar gold mine outa this dump, if he 'a' only had some common sense . . wot th' hell was eatin' him? . . a fellow's gotta' adjust hisself, t' git on, in this world!"

. . . . . .

I went often to the office of "Free Earth" Emma Silverman's Anarchist magazine. I helped about the office, putting wrappers

on the magazines, attending to odds and ends of clerical work—by fits and starts.

It was because I discovered that Opal put in what time she could spare, there, that I was possessed of the sudden desire to help.

When we chanced to sit side by side I was rewarded.

One afternoon, when Opal had not yet arrived, I found Emma Silverman at her desk, alone. . .

After much verbal maneuvering, I dared to ask if Opal already had a lover.

She turned toward me, a fire of terrific rebuke in her eyes.

"Listen, my boy . . among us, love is a private affair."

. . . . . .

Also, the Fernando School was my frequent resort . . for the same reason—Opal was to be seen there, evenings, attending lectures.

It was there that I again met Bill Nankin, an old-time friend of my youth. Then I had known him to be a devout Catholic boy, about to enter a seminary as preparation for the priesthood.

Gentle, stocky, near-sighted,—subdued pimples scattered over his completely circular face—he had since swung to the other extreme: he had given up the Church for philosophic anarchism; to teach at the Fernando School.

He was glad to see me.

"Here," he informed me, "children learn by desiring to learn. Everything proceeds from their own volition, their own initiative.

"Nothing is forced upon them—crammed into them by educational forced feeding. . .

"Control? . . we let them do exactly what they will!"

School session was beginning for the afternoon. The classroom was seething with boys and girls. Some of them still played uproariously about. One or two settled down over books, but they did not read quietly,—they shouted out the words, as they do in Turkish schools . . in monotonous sing-song.

"Shh! just a little quieter, Amour!" Nankin,—trying to use persuasion on the tiniest girl, who went by that name.

"I'll holler if I want to!" asserted the child vociferously.

"*Holler*, then!" answered Nankin placidly, turning away.

Instead of "hollering" the child modulated her voice.

Nankin moved to a large blackboard set in the wall at the end of the room, to demonstrate a problem in arithmetic . . for a boy who enthusiastically shouted each number at the top of his voice like a unique discovery, as the figures whitened after the creaking chalk. . . Another boy, softly mounting the far end of the long table that ran lengthwise with the room, came running along, and, leaping desperately from the table's end as from a springboard, catapulted himself violently on to Nankin's back, and sent the teacher's head, smash, against the blackboard.

There leaped into immediate visibility on Nankin's forehead a lump like a pigeon's egg.

"Here's where the paddle's put to use," I conjectured inwardly.

But Nankin, gently protesting——

"Look 'e here, Jack," he asked easily, "do you think THAT was the right trick for a good anarchist to play on another human being? . ."

Indignant at the little sneak, I broke into vigorous comment——

"A good whaling's what he needs, Bill!"

"Patience'll bring the lad further on the right way than breaking clubs over him."

"I'm not so sure!"

The class was dismissed for the day—prematurely . . Nankin complaining of a headache that set in.

The children set up a great howl of protest, swarming in around their teacher.

The tiny girl named "Amour" caught hold of the first finger of his right hand, with both fists.

"Please don't send us home yet, Bill!" she begged.

"No, Bill," shouted the boy who had given him the weal on the forehead, "you mustn't dismiss class yet; you've got to tell me some more about how the Roman's fought!"

But, seeing their teacher determined, they swiftly turned their attention to play, and swirled out into the street, with a concerted yell. . .

I asked Nankin what the rest of "Amour's" name was.

"Amour Libre—Amour Libre Malinsky."

"What a name to send a child through life with!—you mean that her parents?——"

"Have actually given her that name? Certainly: and we have other children whose parents have named theirs in the same fashion . . to show their faith in the coming Revolution. . .

"They merely follow the habit of the old Puritans, and the custom of all fine Enthusiasts—the Puritans, for instance, named their children Charity, and Faith, and even Praise-God—Bare-Bones. . ."

Nankin led me into an upstairs room to show me some of the drawing and painting the children had done. Some of it was extraordinarily interesting.

He opened a portfolio, too, in which he showed me poems written by the children.

There were one or two of them that many poets of maturity need not have been ashamed of.

"So, you see, we're not such fools after all, up here at Fernando Center."

. . . . . .

On my speaking to Nankin of Liberty Lands, he referred me to Colton himself. Yes, there were any number of inexpensive cottages to be had, there, but Colton was the dictator.

Sundays or Saturdays he was to be found at the Colony, enjoying the rich Radical's luxury of playing the poor man, togged out in immaculate overalls, such as "stage" workingmen wear in a play.

. . . . . .

It was at Liberty Lands.

I was directed to a slight, grey man standing half-way up a long ladder.

"O, I say, Miss Hands, would you reach me that hammer?"

Colton was directing his request to a tall, soldier-like woman who stood near the foot of the ladder. She was the Colony's secretary, and, after Colton, it's general supervisor.

Before she could reach the hammer, I hurried over, picked it up, handed it to Colton. . .

"Thanks!" he mumbled, filling his mouth full of nails.

"Mr. Colton, I'm a writer, and I came out here to find a quiet, inexpensive place where I can write, unmolested."

My remark brought a sidewise, stealthy look from Colton. He mumbled something that I didn't catch; most of the nails were

still in his mouth, though he was assiduously removing them one by one, driving them steadily into the boards.

Miss Hand interpreted for him—seeing me standing by, puzzled.

"Mr. Colton asked who you were."

"Gregory."

He mumbled something again.

"He wants to know if it's John Gregory."

"Yes."

"Wait till he drives the rest of the nails and he'll come down and talk with you."

. . . . . .

Colton was suavely showing me about the colony, which reminded me, not unpleasantly, of Eden . . this would be just the place to bring Opal to.

"Have you ever read my book 'A Man, An Acre'?"

Undiplomatically, I confessed I had not.

He rebuked me, not in words, but by the tone of his voice, saying somewhat testily:

"I think if every one followed out the advice given in that book of mine, most of the problems that perplex and worry men to-day—the economic problems"—he stressed—"would admit of ready solution.

"All any man needs is an acre of tillable ground under his feet—to be independent! . ."

He didn't know at present if he had anything for me. I was to come around and see him in his office, in New York, a few days from then, when he would know definitely.

. . . . . .

Colton's downtown office, situated in one of the clustered skyscrapers of the financial district. . .

I stepped into the building just in time. . .

A great rain-storm was billowing and undulating in flowing sheets of blind silver . . beating with a trampling roar against the many windows of the skyscraper . . all the lights went on in the temporary night.

I waited like a client in an anteroom of Colton's elaborate office—over-awed.

Colton informed me, after I had waited long,—and after a long, delaying talk, that he was sorry, but he could find no place available for me at Liberty Lands. . .

"But you'd better wait here awhile . . in my outer office . . till the storm blows over. . .

"Look—isn't it wonderful!"

We looked out at the silver sheets of water, drawing their great skirts along, hurrying and whipping whole heights of buildings—giants in maelstroms. . .

Dismissing me, Colton pressed into my possession a copy of his book—"A man, An Acre."

. . . . . .

"Colton," Nankin averred, "was afraid of you . . he had places empty, but nothing available for you."

"—And he calls himself a Radical?"

"He thinks that the economic problem should be settled without mixing it up with any other . . he was afraid you'd bring a woman out there to live with you, and stir up trouble . . giving the Colony 'a black eye' with the authorities and the Papers."

"That's just what I *will* do . . now. . ." I talked wildly, without thinking—though hoping my threat would travel back to him—"One woman? no, I'll take two or three girls out there, that I know, —rent a place close to his boundary line so that the Papers will confuse the location . . so that they'll call Liberty Lands a 'free love-colony'. That'll fix him!"

. . . . . .

I turned my attention to Perfection City, Stephen Barton, the Physical Perfectionist's admirable though abortive attempt at the building of a metropolis that was to have served as center and focus for the physical regeneration of mankind . . the place where, in earlier days, I myself had sought after the perfect physical life. . .

Perfection City stood, at present, a dilapidated, down-at-heels community, the soul gone out of it . . there were still, here and there, forlorn shacks, scattered back through the pines . . in which a few Physical Perfectionists struggled on, determined not to give in—similar to a group of communal anchorites of the days of primitive Christianity. . .

And, gaining more and more of them, and pushing them further

and further back, increased, clustered camps and cottages less ramshackle, that small business men of nearby towns had erected for places of Summer refuge . . for themselves and families . . the men leaving their wives and children there—themselves showing up for week-ends in jerky motor cars of cheap construction.

. . . . . .

"Yes, Johnny,—Perfection City's done for!" sighed Billy Seldon, raw foodist and curer of diseases by fasting. . .

Seldon, a naturopath, was desperately hanging on.

"I myself have moved my establishment to Cottswold, where I have a house. The wife and I care for a few patients there.

"But I own a shack here, on the shore of Lake Emily, that you might take for yourself."

Lake Emily—Barton had renamed the small sheet of water after his wife—now divorced from him.

. . . . . .

The shack—Seldon showed me through it. . .

One large room and a kitchen; two chairs, and a table of rough pine; a large bed, well-equipped with necessary blankets, for the nights were cold, in there among the pines.

A few feet down a slope of wild grass, the lake glittered.

About the shack stood a shielding grove of trees.

. . . . . .

"You can sun-bathe here. This fringe of bushes and trees will guard you from people's eyes.

"And there's a boat moored down below the bridge—a dug-out of mine that you can use . . I'll throw it in with the shack." Seldon pointed toward the devious creek that seeped along, the lake's one outlet,—half-stagnant from abundance of water-lily pads that grew in its lazy drift—bearing shoals of lilies yellow and white. . .

"How much do you ask, a month?"

"Six dollars . . and I'll leave this punching bag hanging here, in the back!"

He fetched it an expert bang,—walking off.

. . . . . .

I was back in the City, seeing Whellen, to clinch a few dollars for living on, before settling at Perfection City for the Summer. . .

"Don't you think, Mr. Whellen," I asked, "that I've evidenced

enough genius already, to justify your taking further chances with me?"

Whellen admitted he thought I had—to the extent of advancing me ten dollars a week, for ten weeks—while I worked on a narrative poem I outlined to him—"The Mill." . .

. . . . . .

Also fragments of "The Red Dawn," a revolutionary sequel to "The Mill," were coming to me.

"God's Patient Poor"—the first stanza of "The Red Dawn" ended thus:

> *"God's Patient Poor, nay, let my anger sing,*
> *While insolent Wealth sits on their back, secure,—*
> *The rising wrath of God's Impatient Poor!"* . .

Snatches of "The Mill" were jotted down . . and bits of "The Family," an enormous novel in verse yet-to-be, subversive of the Family System.

If I could but persuade Opal to come and live with me!

She ought to be proud to live with the future Poet Laureate of The Revolution!

. . . . . .

I subjected my shack to a thorough house cleaning, making everything neat for her expected coming.

Strolling into the General Country Store, at Cottswold, I bought at random flower seeds that I had seen exhibited for sale, there, over the candy counter. . .

Sweet alyssum . . poppy . . zinna . . nasturtiums. . .

When Opal arrived I wouldn't tell her about their being planted. . .

And one day she would descry, with delight, flowers springing up in ordered pattern, in our front yard—under the influence of rain and weather.

. . . . . .

"I got so lonesome, out there, for you—that I had to come in!"

Opal, in silence, went on wrapping copies of Free Earth for mailing.

"Can't I help you, Opal?"

Unreplying, she made room for me on the bench beside her, at the table.

"How is it out there?" she asked me, wrapping busily,—to make conversation . . not looking at me . . perfunctorily. . .

"—it's hell, without you!"

Leitman strolled in, went to Emma's desk in the far corner, plumping down. . .

"Didn't you get my letters—all my letters?" I put in,—in a low, shaking voice.

"Please don't talk about them here!" in a lower, determined voice came the reply.

"Will you go to dinner with me . . please? . . I—I have a couple of dollars!"

Very low—glancing toward Leitman—"you poor child!"—moved to unexpected pity by the misery in my voice—"I'll take *you* to dinner."

. . . . . .

"Opal," Jack Leitman shouted across the room, "why don't you take Johnny for your lover and—" he ended with a vulgar phrase.

I grew furious. Opal bit her lips in indignant vexation.

"Jack—keep your dirty tongue to yourself!" I cried.

Opal restrained me, rising from her work.

"A good punch in the snoot would do you good!" I cried again.

"Come on!" commanded Opal, "or soon you'll be as silly as he is!"

Outside, on the stairs:

"Opal, how can you stand Leitman?"

"You're spoiling the question by rooting half its motive in jealousy where there's no need . . if there's ever any need!"

"But HOW *can* you stand him?"

"He has his fine points for which I can overlook his bad ones. He's a great worker for The Movement."

("G—D—Jack!" Emma had once pronounced in my hearing, "he'll drive all the women out of the movement yet!")

. . . . . .

"Opal, WHY didn't you answer my letter?" repeating the question.

"I knew you'd be in soon!"

"What makes you so cruel—so heartless?" I was gesticulating vehemently, exclaiming brokenly.

"Don't act so extravagantly,—please! Peoples are beginning to notice us. . .

"Also," she continued, "I *do* wish you wouldn't show openly, how you feel about me . . in the presence of Emma—and of Mack—and—of the others at the office of Free Earth and at The Fernando Center."

"O God!" I groaned, "I love you so much—I can't help it!"

"If you can't help it," she replied severely, her great, somber eyes turned on me like lamps—"then you mustn't see me any more!"

I gave an inarticulate cry, then I cried loudly, accompanying my cry with a jerky motion of the arms—"I'll kill myself! I swear I'll kill myself!"

People were turning and wondering . . a few were beginning to follow . . at a safe distance. . .

"Shh! my dear!" a gleam of cruel pleasure in her eyes—that vanished, however, on the instant. . .

"O, Johnny, if I could only look up to you as a great Revolutionary Leader!"

"You'll soon be able to! I'm about to become the Poet of The Revolution!" I asserted calmly. . .

She couldn't help laughing at that; but I drew comfort from her laugh.

I quoted my lines on "God's Impatient Poor." I spoke of "The Mill," "The Red Dawn," of "The Family."

I vowed every one of them were to be dedicated to her. . .

She was impressed when I repeated that "The Mill" was already being considered by Whellen . . that he was advancing me money on it . . that it would probably see light in "The Agora."

"Go back to your hut in the Jersey Pines, then, and finish at least one of your poems—"The Mill" first, of course . . when I see a complete poem, then I'll begin to believe in you—whether it's dedicated to me or not!—is that fair?"

"Come out and live with me. Be my sweetheart, my comrade, and inspire me to make masterpieces of them."

"When I get back from Virginia—I might!"—this announcement fell upon me, like thunder out of a clear space.

"When you get—back from Virginia!" I echoed, stunned. . .

"Yes! . .

"Big Joe writes me that the labor situation needs me down there . . he says I ought to do some organizing."

"Big Joe Oakman, the leader of the I.W.W.'s?"

She merely nodded. I choked. Lost my head.

"By God!" I cried. "HE's the one that's your lover!"

Opal flew into a fury that appalled me . . white and tense . . her hands clenched, the nails biting into the palms . . her nostrils flaring like those of a pretty, wild animal about to fly at its attacker. . .

Then she calmed herself, her bosom heaving. . .

"If, if he *were*—what business would that be of yours?

"But, HE'S NOT!"

She pronounced the last words with feminine softness in her voice, —regarding me gently, melted to pity by the desolation in my wild, meager, sex-hungry face.

. . . . . .

"I saw the Conquerors riding by
With trampling feet of horse and men"—

I sat up in bed, a chair upside down behind me—sat between the coarse sheets that smelt of antiseptics,—in the Mills Hotel . . a lodger for the night. . .

I went on writing my poem, attacking War. . .

The Conquerors Riding By—after the well-known picture: Alexander, Cæsar, Hannibal, Attila, Turenne, Wallenstein, Napoleon—and others innumerable . . massing to the fore, tailing out backward, into narrowing, luminous vista. . .

And garnered up on either side of their imperial, ruthless progress —the stark, naked bodies of their victims,—in horrible, stiffened rows—piled as regular as cordwood! . .

Then "all they"—The Conquerors—"perished from the earth

As fleeting shadows from a glass,
And conquering down the centuries
Came Christ, the Swordless, on an ass!"

Whether I believed it wholly or not, it was a grand conception —to put Christ, The Swordless, on an ass, in there, conquering the Conquerors themselves!—and——

"This is THE POEM that will bring me the fame I've waited for so long!" *I* exclaimed—"as 'The Man with the Hoe' brought fame to Edwin Markham . . and, if Opal persists in being mean to me, —when I'm famous, plenty of other women will have me!" the thought hurt and gladdened me; despairfully boasting.

I turned out the light, and went to sleep . . for a little while!— for I had written nearly all night . . and Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang, came, along the corridor, the Man With The Club who beats on the doors at the Mills Hotel at an early hour, to rouse all the sleepers—that the cement floor may be scrubbed, the sheets changed, the cubicle aired and sprayed with antiseptics!

Ugh! that antiseptic odor of half-charity—that one pays for!

. . . . . .

I saw Opal before she sailed on The Old Dominion Liner.

When would she be back?—she didn't know . . maybe early in the Fall, but first she must do her best to put some backbone into the revolutionary movement down there. . .

"Not till the Fall? I think I shall be dead by then—going so long without you!"—utter misery in my voice.

"Now, Johnny, stop trying to play on my sympathy!"

She laid her small gloved hand on my coat sleeve; it tickled to the bone; two fingers of her glove were neatly mended.

I was happy to witness responsive tears in her eyes, glad to see that I had penetrated through her impersonal strict attitude.

"Good-by!" her hand was extended to keep my eagerness off,— keep me off from attempting a kiss of farewell, as much as to extend me a clasp of departure.

"Promise me one thing!" she asked.

"Yes! anything!—anything!" I breathed in swift, abject eagerness.

A faint conquering flicker of a smile capered around her mouth.

"—promise me that you'll write lots of fine poems for the Revolution . . like the one you just read me, about Christ and The Conquerors."

"O, I will! I will! . . and now let me ask you just one question, and—promise it won't make you angry!"

"All right. It won't . . what is it?"

"Will he—Big Joe Oakman—be down there?"

"No—he's out West, organizing the Oregon and Washington Lumbermen."

Silent tears of heart-sickness over her departure were streaming down my cheeks. I hated myself for my abjectness before her. But I couldn't help it. If she had asked me to lie down so she could wipe the mud off her shoes on me, I should have obeyed, looking up smiling.

"What a big baby you are!"

Quickly she kissed me, a light kiss, on the mouth, and withdrawn as soon as given. I tried to kiss back but she was too quick for me. My greediness caught only the air.

. . . . . .

I was proud: she left her glasses with me, glasses, she carefully explained, that she used only for reading—I was to take them to her optician, in the City, with instructions to have them mailed, when fixed, to her address in Norfolk . . one of the lenses had been broken.

Incidentally, that was the method by which she indirectly let me know where I could write her.

For three days I delayed taking her glasses to the oculist, keeping them in my inside pocket next my heart.

I slept with them against my body . . in the Mills Hotel—where, every morning, the Man With The Club goes banging by.

The glasses were something belonging to the woman I loved. . . I was also possessed by an eerie sense of conjuration—half-persuaded that having them in contact with my person must needs draw her toward me.

. . . . . .

When I returned to Perfection City, my true misery and unhappiness began.

I lay awake through nights of burning, sleepless misery.

My pulse would begin like drums all through my body, as soon as I lay down. . .

Several times, each night, to ease my fever, I'd plunge into the lake, swimming far out like a forest animal escaping a fire. . .

The moonlight would seem to seethe in silver froth about me.

I would lay floating, hearing the whippoorwill singing, and wishing it was possible to drown without suffering or a struggle.

. . . . . .

My face came out at me, from the cracked mirror, like the face of another man. It looked so sick and strange that it frightened me.

I was shaving.

"I ought to shave every day. She said she liked men better who did."

Billy Seldon grew alarmed for my health and urged me to leave my solitary shack and repair to his Health Home. He'd put me on a milk diet, free, for old time's sake. . .

An opportune check for thirty dollars, for an article on tramp-life, came from the "Independent."

I hurried to New York, convinced that if I didn't straightway go to Opal, and have it out, win or lose, banishing the sick uncertainty from my life,—I should die.

. . . . . .

I sat on a canvas-seated deck stool, watching the water swirl back from the sides of the Old Dominion Liner, in night-ripples of fluctuant fire. . .

Mostly in couples, to and fro the passengers went in front of me.

All the world seemed mated but myself.

I felt, more than ever, abandoned and alone, listening to the laughter and talk of people enjoying each other's company.

My very bones ached for reciprocated love.

In a line of tiny, golden lights, Atlantic City shone to the West. . .

"Ever been there, Madge?"

"Yep. Played there, onct!"

"Nice place."

"Not so worse!"

The next morning I saw "Madge" closer. And the vulgarly good-looking blonde espied me. "Madge" was the animating center of a vaudeville troupe of acrobats on the way to fill an engagement at Norfolk.

"Oo! people! look at Caruso!"—full of mischievous life and slangy raillery, she indicated me.

Not that I at all resembled the jolly, fat Caruso, but that my skinniness, my long, shaggy hair presented to the popular mind—a rather operatic appearance.

. . . . . .

Resentment and severity, tinged with pleased vanity, was Opal's first attitude toward me.

After she had weathered the first gust of her surprise at my turning up in Norfolk, her immediate question was, where was I putting up?

When I had answered with a street and number I forgot—she said:

"That's the very worst section of the town."

I replied—"it's the best I can afford."

"Nonsense . . you might have rented a room cheaper from some nice family.

"This is not New York; the further South you go, the more you have to keep up appearances.

"You can't begin to imagine how respectable and bourgeois even the Radical is, in the South. . .

"You've got specially to watch your behavior here, visiting me,——

"I'm renting these rooms of a Socialist family—and you know how most Socialists are radical only in the economic sense."

"You—an anarchist, and putting up with Socialists? Opal," I dared, "isn't that playing a double game?"

"I'm biding my time and doing what Big Joe calls 'boring in from the inside' "—stressing the words "Big Joe" fondly. She would never stop quoting "Big Joe" to me. . .

Full of the energy of the fanatic, Opal paced up and down. . .

Vehemently she talked on—

"While I'm dressing the hair of the women down here—the swells—I try to make them dissatisfied with their own stupid, inane married and family life—urging them to get out, to do something, be something for themselves—I tell them a street-walker who takes chances with the police and disease has more stamina than they have!"

While she strode up and down, talking, all my attention was in my hungry eyes, watching her firm breasts that went with a slight bobbing motion:

Detecting the greediness in my eyes, she stopped short.

"Johnny, if you were even a third of a good Revolutionist, I'd give myself to you—if mere physical sex would do you any good," she paused—

"O, do stop looking so damned pitiful!"

She sat down abruptly beside me on the black horsehair sofa, and reached me her hand consolingly. I fastened upon it voraciously. I kissed and kissed it. I kissed close up her arm, like a foolish sheep.

"O, Jesus! O, Jesus, Opal! It *would* do me some good. Only give yourself to me. Only *once!*"

I laid my head miserably in her lap.

"I've come all the way down here!——"

For a long time I pleaded in vain.

She stroked my face, gently, soothingly, with those soft, small, strong hands . . hands made powerful by massaging hundreds of scalps.

She felt my tears on her hands.

Becoming impatient at last—

"Come, sit up like a man; stop being a blubbering boy."

"I can't help it. How I hate myself! I've never done a thing like this in my life before. If any one had told me I should!——"

"Don't now, *then!*"

"Can't you understand? Everything seems to have gone out of me."

"When you show so little backbone, it makes me hate you. That's the effect it has." . .

She prepared me a cup of strong coffee, made me drink it as a mother compels an ailing child to drink bitter medicine.

. . . . . .

I had notified Whellen of my trip South, and every week for the three weeks I was there, his check for ten dollars came promptly.

But I couldn't write a line of the poem.

Perhaps it was that my spirit was sorely troubled, my mind and imagination!

It was certainly not that I didn't have the time.

For one thing, I spent much of the day in the Public Library,—finding the complete works of Crabbe there, and making a deep study of his poetry:

For, from the first, Opal had laid down the law:

"I'm a busy woman; I'm earning my living all day; and in the evening you can't see much of me. I'm scheduled to do a lot of speaking at labor meetings."

"But, Opal," I reiterated, "when I came all the way down here——"

She cut in impatiently, her eyes sparkling with resentment—"*When* are you going back to Perfection City and take up your writing again?"

"Back? don't you wish me to stay?"

"Whether you choose to remain or not is your own affair. I didn't ask you to come, and I'm not asking you to go. But Norfolk's no place to come to, unless you have special business here.

"If you stay, you'll have to come to labor meetings with me——"

Drugged by her company, I would have gone to early Mass every morning if she had bidden me.

I soon perceived that other men were moved by her, though not to my abject degree. They came in droves wherever she spoke, much as men crowd about the drums and flags of the Salvation Army, when an especially pretty girl harangues them to "come to Jesus."

. . . . . .

One evening, as we pushed our way out of a crowded hall, another man went with us. . .

Under ordinary circumstances, his frank, open gaze, his blond, young handsomeness, would have led me to esteem him as a likeable sort.

But when I sensed that Opal was more than ordinarily fond of him, the blood of my secret heart rose up against him.

He was introduced to me as "Comrade Hansen."

I received the strong, callous-handed grip of the mechanic.

I learned he was a worker in the Navy Yard.

My acknowledgment of the introduction was so grim that his eyes quested toward Opal, looking for an explanation.

"It's all right, Jim. Comrade Gregory's one of us!"

Together we escorted Opal home to her door.

But, arrived there, I was dismissed with a slack handshake. And, as I rounded the corner, I couldn't help looking back—to observe, at the exact moment that it happened, that Hansen was being KISSED good-by.

It was scarcely palliative that the kiss was obviously a perfunctory one, and that he, too, afterward, turned on his heel and departed.

. . . . . .

Comrade Samuels' rigorousness toward me increased. Now she couldn't see me for three nights running. But that didn't prevent my walking past where she lived, again and again, like a watchman, each of those interdicted nights.

And when, at last, I returned to my room,—toward dawn to close my tortured eyes,—it was to be harassed by a succession of nightmares, the most bitter of which, continually recurring, pictured her intimately embraced by Big Joe Oakman or Jim Hansen. . .

And, traipsing past her place, when at last I detected light within, edging the drawn blinds with golden fringes,—I went frantic, imagining her closed eyes, her yielded, pretty face, beneath Hansen's kisses.

Once, during my frantic twisting and turning around and around, —on the last night of my surreptitious vigil, I chanced to pass by a hotel.

A group of men and women sat out on the veranda . . tilting back in rockers . . lounging on the railings . . cluttering the steps. . .

They were racketing, and kidding each other in a manner strangely familiar to me. . .

"OO!! Look! there goes our old friend Caruso again!"

Had they really made that much of a jest of me on the boat, that they should recall it now? . .

For it was "Madge," together with the vaudeville troupe that had come down on The Old Dominion Liner with me.

"Yes," I murmured, verbally flagellating myself, "I MUST look like a freak!

"I'll go and have my hair cut right away," I resolved. "These

people are silly and they're vulgar,—but I'm about sick and tired of being noticed for trivial, eternal peculiarities."

. . . . . .

"Why, Johnny," Opal exclaimed in surprise, evincing a warmer regard for me than she had shown before—"you've had your hair cut, haven't you? You can't imagine what an improvement it makes. You look almost handsome . . and much more civilized."

"I'm glad you approve of my hair cut, and of my appearing 'more civilized'," I returned, smiling wryly.

. . . . . .

I checked myself, temporarily, but could not long hold back my resentment at having seen her kiss Hansen good-night. . .

"The other night, when we said good-night," I began.

"Yes?"

"You—you—," I could contain myself no further—"you kissed that —— good-by."

"John Gregory, how DARE you!—" surprised anger constricted her throat from further utterance.

"O, I know I've lost you, all right—I know that well enough—spoiled all my chances—if I ever had any—" I proceeded, embittered, "and so it wasn't Joe Oakman that was your lover"—seeking to hurt—"a great man, even if he is middle-aged and one-eyed . . no, by Christ, it had to be this insignificant—" again I ripped out a series of curses against Hansen——

"I see it now, you fraud!

"It wasn't for the Revolution you came down here, but FOR HIM!"

"Shut your mouth! stop your insane raving, will you!"

I kept it up, however, not heeding. I was noisy, incoherent, voluble.

That I was the one that had let myself in for it—myself the only one at fault—made the situation not better, but worse.

"O God, O my dear God! how I've suffered!"

"The other people in the house—be quieter—please—" Opal begged.

"To hell with the rest of the people in the house!"

I caught her violently into my arms. I would plead and whine no more. I would take her by force. She fought hardily against me.

"I'll call for help, if you don't let me go,—this instant."

"Go ahead. Call for help! I don't care. I'm not going to let you torture me any longer."

We stumbled over a chair, just catching ourselves from falling. The flimsy chair broke crackling.

"You rotten cad!"

She rent at my face with her nails—one hand dragged free of my hold.

"You dirty dog! *You*—talk about love!"

The salt taste of blood trickled from my face into my lips.

I caught her tighter, renewing the struggle to overcome her.

"I don't care if all the world comes rushing—I won't let you go!—I won't be defeated—I'll whine and beg no more—I love you and I'll kill you—or myself—or both of us—you've got to become my sweetheart—my mistress—this very minute——"

I let go her body, caught her head swiftly into my hands, dragged her by the head toward me, crushed my lips into hers till it hurt.

She spat into my mouth.

Some one beat up on the ceiling from below, in vigorous remonstrance—with the end of a broomstick!

She broke back from me.

She stood far back, eying me, her head poised beautifully like an angry bird's. . .

Her gorgeous breasts heaved in a tumult . . from the struggle . . from her fury. . .

Noticing that she had made a shambles of one side of my face with her nails, her mood softened.

"You're bleeding . . you fool! . .

"I didn't mean to scratch you so hard, but it's your own fault.

"Come over to the stand, and let me wash the blood off!"

Then she bathed my face, applied some stinging antiseptic lotion to the scratches. One scratch needed courtplaster.

"There's a beauty-spot for you to wear!

"I never knew you COULD be wild like that—but I might have guessed—" she flashed a laugh, a bit of pleased laugh.

"Come and sit down here beside me!" she made a place on the customary horse-hair sofa—"and now, Johnny, listen to me——"

Her laugh encouraged me once more . . *perhaps if I had but fought a little longer!*——

"I don't want to listen to you. I still want you to give yourself to me."

I was beginning again.

But, this time, like a nurse handling an insane patient, she fetched me an appalling, impersonal slap across the well side of my face.

The sharp impersonality of that slap withered me into final acceptance of defeat.

. . . . . .

But, before I left her forever, I must set myself free with some sort of surety—

"Opal—for the last time—isn't it true that you wouldn't have me,—give yourself to me, because you already belong to Hansen?"

She didn't answer.

"If it isn't Hansen, who is it?"

"No one, dear!"

My heart leaped, my fool of a heart—she had never called me "dear" before. . .

"Is it Big Joe?" I persisted.

"I admire him greatly."

"Then, finally, there's no hope for me?"

"Not at present, Johnny."

"There is, in the future?"

"How can I tell?"

"Then, why," I asked, "why did you keep encouraging me—let me come all the way down here?"

"How could I have stopped you?"

"Why did you just now call me 'dear'?"

"Because you're less than a child—you're a baby." . .

"Anyhow," I persisted, "Oakman's not here, and——"

"That doesn't make the least bit of difference."

"And he probably isn't true to you, wherever he is"—spitefully.

"Probably not!" she returned rather sadly, forgetfully—thus confessing a relationship she had hitherto constantly denied.

"THEN WHY NOT?—" I was indiscourageable.

She rose, straight and dignified. . .

"BECAUSE I DON'T WANT YOU OR ANY ONE ELSE! . . I thought a poet would understand . . I see a poet can be as stupid as other men."

. . . . . .

The quaintest climax . . renewed amiability over coffee . . the storm completely blown over. . .

"Yes, we can still be friends, but, under the circumstances, I guess you'd better go back to New York."

. . . . . .

"Ooo! look! Caruso's gone and got himself a haircut!"

Deliberately I had walked past the hotel where the vaudeville troupe was putting up; till, recognizing me, they had noticed my changed appearance.

Though they were, and remained, absolute strangers, their ignorant, facetious, insulting approval made me feel better.

. . . . . .

On the boat, returning.

A fear obsessed me, that, during the night, I might not be able to keep myself from walking overboard in my sleep.

I broke out into a sweat.

I locked the stateroom door. I devised a stratagem against my sleeping self, by hiding the key under the mattress. . .

My eyes came open with a start.

I discovered my body pressed against the rail. My eyes stared out into a high, windy night of flying stars and a bright, cloud-scudding ocean moon.

I'd found the key, alright.

I returned to my bunk, rejoicing in a cleverer stratagem: this time I put the key at the bottom of a pitcher of water. . .

People walking briskly back and forth,—as I sank back to sleep. I couldn't help hearing their trivial talk:

"An' they say the South's dead," boasted a drummer, who had evidently been describing the sales he had made there, as an evidence of its aliveness.

"Well, since the War, they're never really been what they used to be."

"But they know how to keep the niggers in their place."

. . . . . .

There was a great flow of water all about me.

No one had seen me go overboard. No one could hear me crying for help; the lights of the ship swung off, diminishing down the Dark.

Now I had done it. Now all the life different from others that I had lived, would count for waste. I would never win my fame.

. . . . . .

Fully awake, I laughed hysterically.

My hand had been reaching down into the pitcher for the key placed there. And the shock of the water on my hand and bare forearm had given me that frightful dream of going overboard, coincident with its waking me up.

Unnerved, I spent the remainder of the night, sitting awake. . .

When I heard the passengers scurrying about, I stepped forth, glad to look through living eyes on the sky-backing clutter of buildings that sums Lower Manhattan . . shouldering up into a great azure morning.

. . . . . .

For days I stayed in and about my hut like a sick man who had touched the fringes of death and was slowly winning back to life. . .

I wrote Opal no letters. I realized their uselessness.

Then, one morning, I leaped vigorously out of bed, furious at myself for my callowness and asininity of behavior. . .

I said vile things of her and of her face, and was immediately ashamed of myself for such parrot repetition of words I did not mean—words that fill blind, bigoted minds, but should never have come into mine—not even as an echo.

I could have spewed my own soul out of my mouth, if that were possible, for disgust of myself. . .

. . . . . .

I ran out and jumped, both feet at once, into my haphazard flower bed, that I had planted in anticipation of Opal's coming to me . . kicking the soft earth right and left. . .

Having destroyed all possibility of its further growth—I felt satisfied, relieved.

. . . . . .

"Jack, I've come all the way in from my hut, to look over the proofs of 'The Conqueror—' " for I had sold the poem to *Manton's.*

"You might have spared yourself the trip——"

"No—I had a definite psychic hunch some one was making changes in it."

Though I starved, lived in barbarous huts and chill attics, I averred,—at least my poems must stay as I wrote them, must be all my own . . I must have something in return for my strange existence. . .

Miles had the proof brought in.

"Look it over, and you'll find you're mistaken . . you're an awful nut, with your 'psychic hunches.' "

But the poem *had* been tampered with—in one of the lines,—the word "fire" had been put in place of the word "hell."

Jack Miles agreed that, since *Manton's* tabooed "hell," I might have the privilege of selling the poem elsewhere, provided I brought back the equivalent of the check they had paid for it.

I crossed Madison Square from the Flatiron Building to the offices of *The National.* . .

Siddon, amused at *Manton's* taboo, bought the poem immediately, with the word "hell" put back in its place. I was paid immediately, walking out with twenty-five dollars in my hand; I was ten dollars ahead of the game. . .

. . . . . .

Though *Manton's* would not tolerate a word that *The National* allowed, yet the former magazine was the first to break the editorial embargo against me. I'd have been in a pretty fix if Miles had not, as representative of *Manton's,* taken it upon himself to break it.

I knew that, had it not been for that, Galusha Siddon and *The National,* "hell" or not, would never have bought my poem.

. . . . . .

Jack Miles was not a whit apologetic:

"It's not what the editors want, but what the subscribers demand.

"You've no idea, Johnny, how closely every word in our magazine's scrutinized. . .

"Old subscribers take it like the Bible."

"If it *were* only some old subscriber that objected!" I retorted, "but it's quite as likely to be some crazy sheepherder out in Montana, who picks up a stray copy of your magazine, in some aban-

doned hut . . a weather-worn copy tossed aside, there, that he never paid a cent for. . .

"Having a lot of time on his hands, your crazy sheepherder lamely spells out a letter, protesting against something or other in its pages——

"Result: a conference is promptly called, and you let that moron, and others like him,—practically dictate an editorial policy for thousands of silent, intelligent, well-satisfied readers . . who are too busy to write crank letters."

"You're not an editor, or you'd know better!"

. . . . . .

Now came my long-deferred arrival at Greenwich Village . . the Greenwich Village of fifteen years ago, the true one . . . the one that existed before the present invasion of slummers in search of the Bohemian Life of sly naughtiness and semi-artistic tawdriness that, in turn, had its origin and sole being in the brains and fancies of a few sensational hacks, space-writers, and reporters, who, themselves many of them literary and artistic failures, sought to vent their spite on those who, through all their poverty and all their mistakes, held to this one thing—Sincerity in their Art!

Unfortunately, expectations bring realities into being—especially if there's money involved. . .

Later, joints crept into sight, like the show places for tourists at the base of The Montmartre.

But nothing of the sort existed then.

It was as yet the unexploited Village of The Old Farm, of Bertolloti's, The Little Club, Renganeschi's, and The Liberal Club.

. . . . . .

A large lady—whose fatness shook when she walked—opened the door of a house in Vanness Place where I had seen the sign "rooms for rent."

The landlady had a bright, scrubbed face. She was all wrapped up in a careless dressing gown; she was soapily fresh from a bath.

She showed me to a hall bedroom in the back, three flights up,—clutching her gown across her wide bosom, with a fat-fingered hand.

"Are you a writer?"

"Yes—a poet."

She looked thoughtful.

To make a good impression I paid two weeks rent in advance.

She seemed gently relieved.

Following the vein of the same gentle relief, she explained—

"—Not that I don't welcome writers—they're generally honest—most artists and that kind of people, are! . . contrary to the general opinion; when they have any money to be honest with!"

I asked, as eager for Bohemia as any school teacher now is, on a visit from the Middle West—

"—You have other writers living here?"

"At present, only one . . a young fellow by the name of Julius Flatman. Do you happen to know him?"

"No . . what does he write?"

"Novels . . on the side . . makes his living editing a trade magazine—a soda-fountain-supply magazine, I think."

She continued:

"There ain't much in poetry, is there?"

"Lots of fame, if a chap puts it over!"

"Fame?"

"Certainly—Mrs. Nough!" (she had told me her name) "I'd rather be a famous poet than have all the money in the world!"

She smiled dubiously but protectively; I closed the door of my hall bedroom; I knew from that parting smile that she would allow me leeway, in the matter of rent, when I needed it.

. . . . . .

In that hall bedroom I stayed, desperately lonely, but again determined to give myself utterly to my Muse . . trying to finish my narrative poems that I had begun.

I deliberately avoided the Fernando Center. I wrote, walked, wrote . . studied in the Public Library at Forty-second Street . . remained solitary. . .

I suffered, God, how I suffered, for women, and for their companionship.

. . . . . .

But, when the keen breath of Autumn began filling the air with sharpness, that, after the heavy City Summer, turned breathing into something deep and good,—a letter came from Ruth, care of Whellen. A letter inviting me to Tarleton Farms, where she and her Single Tax Millionaire, Raymond Didier, lived.

She was wise enough to enclose a ticket.

Mrs. Nough, my protective, good-natured landlady, who mysteriously prided herself on understanding the artistic temperament—Mrs. Nough consented to keep my books stored in her attic against my return—whether, at that time—she would have a room left for me or not.

. . . . . .

Ruth and Didier met me at the station . . both sitting back in a big car . . lapped and wrapped around with furs and robes. . .

While Didier, covered to the whitish tufts of his eyebrows, spoke from far down in his robes,—making shy conversation,—I rode along, affectedly gay, refusing all covering, tensing myself against the little razors of the wind that played in and out through my thin clothing, like ice rubbed against the skin to the point of pain.

I had brought no overcoat. I owned none. It was a principle of mine to weather out the winters, in an ordinary coat.

Ruth tried to swathe me in a bear skin. I resisted, showing off.

"Be careful, or you'll catch your death of cold!" warned Raymond Didier, his face full of a guileless, restless look.

"O, I can stand the cold!" I boasted.

"It's five miles yet to Tarleton Farms," Ruth warned.

. . . . . .

The intense cold continued.

The fact, together with Ruth's flattering me by commenting on my "fine, big chest," and how much finer and bigger it would look in the all-wool sweater she brought forward,—induced me to accept her gift, and consent to dress warmer.

Then we set out on a long tramp. . .

"It wasn't only for the fresh air and temporary freedom from economic worry that I persuaded Raymond to invite you up here. . .

"As I said before I left,—promising to have you up on a visit—I have much to tell you for your own good——

"Literary advice to give.

"You're in danger of the slipshod; I've been watching your lyrics as they appear in the magazines. . .

"You're slipping into the trick of dashing off occasional lyrics, resting content with a fine line happening here and there. . .

"Instead of 'loading every rift with gold' according to Keats' dictum.

"You're twenty-nine, and it's high time you bound yourself down to that very 'sweat of soul' that all true genius consists of. . .

"That's what, primarily, I've got you up here for—to encourage you—to teach you——"

"It isn't because I haven't been trying hard—" I began defensively.

"Yes. I know," rebukingly, "I've heard from Whellen about your abortive narrative poem—how you took his money and never completed——"

"It wasn't because I set out with the idea of trimming him, Ruth! I just didn't have it in me to finish 'The Mill'; I could write individual stanzas that were fine lyrics, standing alone,—but I couldn't hook them up smoothly, carrying the flow along—the flow of the story."

"I knew that was where your fault lay.

"Whellen sent me a carbon copy of the little you'd submitted.

"Do you know what Poe said about the long poem?"

"He wrote that every long poem is nothing but a series of fine lyric bursts linked together by stretches of rhythmic prose," I responded.

"The trick is, then, to seize on the times when you're still in the full glow of inspiration, and to go back and work over and over those passages of metrical prose, substituting more lively adjectives here and there—kicking out the words that have stale usage imbedded in them, or refurbishing the trite word to its pristine brightness, by juxtaposition to another word which will shade it into a fresh connotation——"

. . . . . .

"Speaking of inspiration?—Has Didier *any* INSPIRATION in the house . ." when she looked puzzled. "I mean—anything in the liquid line."

I capered on the road.

"There you go—horseplaying, when I was trying to hammer some literary sense into you . . you're nothing but a big, senseless, happy billy-goat."

"You don't guess how much wine helps a poet."

"There's no wine in the house . . but Raymond has a few barrels of hard cider stored in the cellar. But, like many wealthy men, he's rather parsimonious—even with his hard cider."

"Can't you inveigle a bottle for me, from time to time?"

"It's powerful stuff."

"A tumbler full of it a day would keep me on the crest. I'd promise to bring 'The Mill' to its conclusion in fine shape, if I could have that much!"

"All right! I'll get it for you, old Billy Goat,—if I'm forced to sneak it."

. . . . . .

And now the weather swung around; the sky opened, pouring down floods of bright light; the days grew unaccountably milder; it was Indian Summer. . .

Settled at the base of a hill dyed vari-colored with many tops and levels of gorgeous dying foliage—there lay a small lake, a possession of Didier's.

There was a boathouse on its north shore, where waited a veritable fleet of boats and canoes, under shelter of a low roof.

I dragged out a canoe. I had brought along a bottle of hard cider that Ruth had with difficulty wheedled from Didier . . and my pad and pencil.

I had little experience in the management of a canoe, yet I confidently pushed off, careful to poise, immobile, in the exact center of its equilibrium. . .

I drifted, writing. . .

The keen air, the cider, the freedom from economic worry, sent my poem along at a good pace. . .

Day paced rapidly by . . so rapidly that I forgot to eat a couple of sandwiches I had brought; writing, absorbed.

Drifting . . a bump, and I would find the canoe dragging into a cove, low branches catching about my head, showering me with a dozen autumn colors of leaves. . .

It was not till Ruth called from the shore that supper was ready, that I started into awareness of my surroundings.

Showing off, I waved the paddle high in the air, in response.

In an instant I was over, in icy water four times my depth. It was so icy that my body ached everywhere, like a toothache.

Ruth screamed.

Luckily, the water was completely smooth except for small, twilight-colored and leaf-reflecting ripples that a very light, night-heralding wind was setting into ghosts of motion.

I managed to scramble up on the overturned canoe; I lay there flat on my belly, oaring myself slowly in, shaking violently from the scare and the icy wet of the water. . .

I thought first of my manuscript. It was in my inside pocket. I had automatically stuffed it there, before uplifting the paddle.

But the bottle of hard cider—still two-thirds full,—for I had dealt gently with it—it was bobbing off, riding out of sight.

. . . . . .

Indian Summer continuing, I was on the lake daily, composing my poem, wearing my all-wool sweater,—drifting in the canoe.

"The Mill" progressed. Something had clicked inside me; I was making stanza flow upon stanza that narrated a continuous story.

I made the boast to myself—and to Ruth and Didier—that I was bringing a new kind of poetry into English Literature—"the poetry of life as it is lived to-day." . .

I could not know, that, ironically enough from my own standpoint, a much greater poet than I was antedating me . . John Masefield . . perhaps at that very moment emptying the spittoons and polishing the brass railings in Luke O'Connor's saloon, on the corner of Greenwich Avenue and Christopher Street, where the cars turn down to the Ferry . . in his brain, already stirring "The Widow In The Bye-Street," "The Everlasting Mercy," "Dauber." . .

The fault with me—first I talked and talked about what I was doing, boasted and boasted about it—to any one, almost, who would listen . . that delayed the execution of the project—or, worse, I took it out entirely in talk. . .

. . . . . .

Lying in a cove in the canoe, I had at last brought "The Mill" to its final stanza. I was proud. Here was one thing I had not talked out of existence. . .

A heavy wind had risen. Outside the shelter of the cove, foamed a welter of water. . .

Carelessly I thrust the canoe, nose-outward, into that welter—

and was promptly catapulted back . . and tossed obliquely up on an adjacent beach of fine gravel. . .

I saw I must either paddle my way across the lake, or draw the canoe up, leaving it there for the night, and thresh my way completely around the lake afoot, through a tangle of underbrush and briars that would tear half my clothes off, scratch me all up, too.

I squatted down out of the wind, to consider. I drank the rest of the applejack for courage,—determining immediately that, with a steadying rock in the bottom, I could make it across in the very teeth of the high wind and on-rushing waves.

Excessive and unwarranted timidity at the beginning—followed by as excessive and unwarranted an assurance!—my customary trick of behavior! . .

Paddling furiously, I made it out beyond the first welter. If I hadn't been drunk I could never have made it.

The wind whistling and singing like innumerable arrows—whipping and whirling, it turned me about and about.

Now I had to go on. I gave a shout of combat.

Waves slapped in. A cramp seized on my right leg, and I straightened the cramp out of it. . .

At last the reality of the danger brought me cold-sober, in the middle of the lake.

Fear kneaded at the pit of my stomach. If I had only kept drunk a while longer!——

But I had to push on, for it was as far back as it was across. . .

. . . . . .

I was panting, sick with fear and with the struggle. . .

"Damn that applejack—if I hadn't drained it down, I wouldn't be out here. . . I'd have walked around." . .

Now they would find my body, just as Shelley's was found, on the sands of the Adriatic. . .

Fool—I saw the headlines in the papers! . .

Thank God for that Disinterested Spectator at the core of me; the Power that was ME—that now rose up and took command! . . making my body a machine to do its bidding. . .

. . . . . .

The canoe foundered, when, providentially, I was near enough to the shore to wade in. . .

I scrambled up the hillside path slippery with fallen Autumn leaves.

Opening the front door, I stepped against Ruth and Raymond Didier wrapped up heavily, just starting out to find me.

"I've just had a great adventure!" I shouted, dinning their ears —trembling all over from after-shock. . . I told of my escape . . and learned from them, in turn, that while Didier was dictating letters to Ruth, a distinct feeling had come upon them that I was in danger down there.

. . . . . .

"I thought cider was all he had?"

"I thought so, too!"—Ruth, laughing, "but he gave me this whisky to make you a hot drink."

Ruth had urged me to take a hot bath and go to bed . . and she had brought me up the toddy. . .

She sat, awhile, reading my poem "The Mill."

"It's pretty good!"

"Don't you think I'm a genius?"

"Let me watch you a few years longer, before I can say."

"If it wasn't for the torture of sex . . if I only possessed the One Woman!"

"You'll make a hit with many women, because you're such a plunging fool."

"Many women? I only want One . . THE ONE!"

"You're half a hypocrite, saying that . . going from one woman to the other, in search of the One . . that you'll never find."

"I will find her! I know she's waiting for me, somewhere—the woman who will make me calm for my work."

"That beautiful, red-headed girl you're always dinning me about?

"God pity her, if you ever do find her!"

. . . . . .

Didier at last persuaded me to go the rounds of his estate with him . . part of which he was half-heartedly trying to convert into a Single Tax Colony.

So far, he had acquired not equal-spirited colonists—but tenants that clustered about him in the subdued, deferential manner of the Old Country. He liked playing the Lord of the Manor.

Fine cottages, a goodly group of barns stocked with blooded cattle that flourished under the scientific eye of his farm-foreman, —a "Mister" Montgomery, who stood aloof, proud as a whip—and whom Didier carefully and formally spoke to as "Mister"—not daring to address him brusquely and briskly by his simple name, as he did his other employees . . to meet with an obsequiousness, cap-in-hand, in turn. . .

"Montgomery's the real boss on Tarleton Farms," Ruth, privately —"Montgomery does his work efficiently, scrupulously exacts respect. . .

"For, in spite of his theories about the advancement of humanity, Didier likes to patronize, is somewhat of a snob . . you've noticed that. . .

"The trouble with him—he's never known actual contact with life in the rough. . .

"Since his birth there's been a wall of caste and money between him and the world."

"Poor man!"

Ruth turned on me instantly, surprisingly—

"You've a nerve, to be sorry for him. Be sorry for yourself! for you've been bumped into, by all kinds of life—yet you've learned no more than he has!"

She fell silent, as if regretting the outburst.

. . . . . .

Didier formally announced that I was to accompany Ruth and himself to dinner, that evening.

There was, in his bearing and tone, all the acclamatory ostentation of the penurious, the close-fisted. . .

Customarily, Ruth and I breakfasted, lunched, ate dinner, alone together.

I learned that my stay at the Didier mansion was at her expense, excepting, of course, that my room was rent-free.

. . . . . .

There were three very old women, old maids, who lived in their ancestral home, down the road. These old women served Didier dinner every night.

Once or twice a week, before my arrival at Tarleton Farms, it had been Didier's custom to take Ruth there for dinner, too. . .

Though Didier traced his descent from a Revolutionary General, "The Three Norns"—Ruth's name for them—traced theirs back to the "Mayflower."

We stood under the old-fashioned, iron-latticed lanthorn that swung over the porch of the house where they dwelt. . .

Didier, before he thwacked the knocker against the door, whispered the foregoing information to me, beaming snobbishly . . happy to humble himself before people who boasted a greater ancestral tree. . .

. . . . . .

The "Three Norns," for all their aristocratic descent, knew how to cook. Their boiled New England dinner was delicious.

. . . . . .

"What's Didier's wife like?" I asked Ruth.

"Beautiful, stately, frigid as an iceberg."

"Where is she?"

"Seldom here. There's another big house, over the hill, that belongs to her, when she's here."

"She hates her husband's half-hearted experiments in sociology; his three stately, frigid daughters hate them, too. . .

"But, in justice to them—Mrs. Didier and the daughters,—he's wrong, when he asserts that she, and *they*, indirectly hold him up to ridicule among the Back Bay Set. . .

"He brings that ridicule on himself, by going about in a wretched, apologetic manner, like a frost-bitten little boy . . dressing meanly . . when he's among them."

"Frost-bitten with half-ideas!" I put in, "a damned silly Single Taxer. . .

"The theory of the Single Tax is itself an evasion. . .

"Everything's got to be smashed. . .

"Society's got to begin all over again, with a clean slate"—for the moment I vehemently believed in what I was proclaiming——

"Didier's for transitions," explained Ruth, "for more gentle methods . . Single Tax . . Proportional Representation. . .

"He's puzzled . . all at odds with life and with himself. . . I'm so sorry for him!"

"I'm not,—the mean, little frost-bitten miser!" I exclaimed wildly, secretly envying him his wealth and his great house to live in——

"You ought not to say that, when it's his hospitality you're enjoying."

"*His* hospitality?—when he lets me stay here because you asked him? . .

"He has plenty of room in his house, but you're paying for the food, except when he invites us to dine at The Three Norns—to show himself off, patronizing the Greater though Poorer, Aristocracy!

"He was stingy enough even to dole out his applejack——

"You've confessed, that, after that first bottle, you stole the rest for me—mostly——"

"So that's the reason you fulminate against him!" Ruth laughed the tears down her cheeks——

"But, seriously, Johnny," when she had recovered—"when Raymond Didier hits upon some Cause that he believes in enough to give his money to—you ought to see how his pocketbook loosens up . . wait and see for yourself. . . Mrs. Gerhault's coming——"

I did not have long to "wait and see."

In a few days Mrs. Rhea Gerhault arrived. . . President of The Agricultural Republic Coöperative Association . . to appeal to Didier for funds.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Gerhault had been living in our big house of nearly fifty rooms, close upon a week, before I laid eyes on her.

For she and Didier were straightway hand in glove together. They were off together most of the time.

At the time Didier was driving around the countryside in his big car, campaigning for Proportional Representation, and Mrs. Gerhault, either politicly or genuinely, was readily abetting his enthusiasm to the extent of speaking, along with him, in favor of the same idea.

. . . . . .

I was growing curious about Mrs. Gerhault:

"Ruth, what kind of woman is she?"

"—good-looking . . of the imperious Zenobia type. . .

"In spite of her masterfulness, she pulls all the feminine stuff . . wears dainty, frilly shirtwaists . . uses delicate perfumes . . pow-

derpuffs . . in short, dresses exquisitely, and remains a trifle upstage . . which also helps a little."

"Aren't you the least bit worried?"

"Worried about what?"

"That Didier might fall for her?"

Ruth saw that I was trying to tease her. She fetched me a vigorous kick in the shin, a new trick of hers, to match my horseplay.

"I'm resentful of only one thing: Gerrie's swagger puts it over so far, that he's taking her to 'The Norns' for dinner every evening."

"Which teaches that it pays to chuck a good bluff while you're at it," I observed . ."myself, I think I made a great mistake, continuing the rôle of tramp—I see now where I might have gone much further, playing the opposite game."

. . . . . .

Ruth was being sent to Boston on some private business of Didier's. I was accompanying her.

Didier's silent, anonymous chauffeur drove the Bostonward-rushing car at deft, whizzing speed. . .

The smooth-running, great-bodied machine took the hills with a long cough of power, and hurled down backward-flying slopes of road with all its wheels seeming to boom.

The chauffeur seemed to fit in, an impersonal part of the powerful machine.

Ruth and I, in the back seat, talked intimately, personally, as if he were not there.

. . . . . .

Tall, angular, voluble,—old, but in a hale, peasant, Irish way, a certain Katie O'Donovan was the sole dweller in the townhouse of the Didiers'—it's caretaker.

There she abided, derelict amid the covered furniture and window-darkened rooms.

But the kitchen she kept alive and bright, the cooking range red-hot at every stovelid, steam jetting from several pots, a canary singing in a cheery corner.

"They're seldom at home—the Didiers," Katie bewailed, after the manner of a faithful retainer—"when it's in such a fine, great mansion they should be thrivin' an' snug together."

I suggested that people who found their lives incompatible together, should seek liberation in divorce.

"No, me spry lad," swiftly returned the old, straight-laced Irishwoman—"It's divorce that's the matter wit the worruld. . .

"If people knowed they could nevur be divorced, wouldn't they be the ones, then, that'd try to make a good job out o' what there was no gettin' out of! . . they'd be bearin' an' forbearin', then, and tryin' harder to be happy with each other . . as indade The Holy Church itself taches!" and she crossed herself with that rapid, consummate sketchiness of manual motion that comes with years of devout and faithful practice of the gesture.

. . . . . .

We sat up rather late, talking with Katie.

She was a distant relation of Fitz James Obrien, and knew all about his life. And what he had written was her hobby. . .

When it came time for retiring for the night, the old lady mysteriously drew Ruth to one side, and whispered buzzingly into her ear.

. . . . . .

"What was the matter with the old girl?" I asked Ruth, next day.

Ruth was merry over the incident——

Katie had anxiously inquired of her if I was "her man," and were we ultimately to be married?

If so, she'd bed us in one bed,—if we intended, later on, "to step before the Prast."

But when Ruth had assured her that there was nothing between us and we had no intention of marrying—she had shown me upstairs to a room under the roof, while Ruth she had put in the room next hers; and Ruth believed the old girl had lain awake all night, listening for her door to creak . . that there might be no sin on her head . . like the strange old peasant she was!

. . . . . .

Mrs. Rhea Gerhault had departed by the time we got back from Boston to Tarleton Farms. . .

I had never seen her but once or twice flittingly. . .

I was put out that Didier had not introduced me . . was he considering me a mere subsidiary guest—of his stenographer?

But I dropped my feeling of resentful disquiet, in curiosity over Didier's new appearance. . .

He looked grey-faced and altered . . as if he had gone several days unshaven . . he looked more peaked and frost-bitten than ever. . .

"What's the matter with him, Ruth?"

"His money-conscience is hurting him."

"Money-conscience?" . .

Ruth explained that Didier, every time he gave anything to any Cause he believed in, was afterward remorseful for having let his money go . . she added that he had donated ten thousand dollars to the furtherance of Mrs. Gerhault's back-to-the-land movement. . .

"Not that it was inveigled out of him for any false purpose," explained Ruth—"for Gerrie will scrupulously apply every cent of it to the uses of The Agricultural Republic Coöperative Association. . .

"But Didier—note him carefully—the parsimonious instinct in him, for the next few days, will nip him with its burning pincers to the point of sickness. . .

"Already he's vainly trying to recoup by petty retrenchments."

I learned that Didier, to no avail, had first blandly suggested to Ruth that she accept a reduction of two dollars a week in salary, then had been daring enough to try to reduce his unspeaking, anonymous chauffeur in salary . . had had a violent altercation with the latter, from which he had come off red with discomfiture. . .

He would catch it from his wife and daughters, when they learned of his donation! Ruth averred . . as he always caught it heavy from them, each time he gave money for any Cause. . .

. . . . . .

Ruth halted by me, trained to silence by my mood—for I was under the inspiration of a poem—was rapidly writing . . in a moment, I slipped the pad back in my pocket, and we strode on. . .

Another great house of fifty rooms loomed before us—undwelt in . . on another section of the vast estate . . the house to which, on infrequent occasions, Mrs. Didier retired. . .

Ruth had brought me there, wishing to show me through its fine library of poetry.

Mrs. Didier was, in her fashionable way, a poet of parts.

Standing between the high-piled shelves of the library, the volumes of which stood dusty and rarely used, my eyes popped out like a miser's in the presence of a hoard of alien gold.

"It's a crime,—her possessing all these books, while I——"

"Johnny, you stick that book back where you took it from—I know your propensity——"

"She wouldn't miss just this one."

"What one is it?"

"An exquisite anthology of lyrics from the Middle English—which contains the poem I've been long searching for—the one that was written down on the edge of an old manuscript, by an anonymous Oxford scholar—

"O, Western Wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain—
Chirst, that my love were in my arms
And I, in my bed again!"

. . . . . .

Leaving the big, forlorn house, I commented on what an actual crime it was for the Idle Rich to own houses unoccupied and completely furnished and equipped—houses dotting the landscapes all about the country from Maine to California. . .

"—wouldn't blame the hoboes if they broke into such houses and put up there."

I paused thoughtfully—

"That's a good idea, you know. I'll broach it to the big I.W.W. leaders when I go back to the City.

"Confiscation of the Unused Country Houses of The Idle Rich!

"I knew a bunch of bums, that once did just that thing:

"When caught at it, the owner was decent enough to let them go unjailed, because, being a set of unusually neat individuals, they not only had not wrecked the place (which many hoboes would have done) but they'd kept the floors scrubbed and swept, had put every dish back, clean and unbroken, on the cupboard shelves."

. . . . . .

I was certain that Didier and I would sooner or later come to the clashing point, despite my trying, for Ruth's sake, to remain polite, the duration of my visit.

The clash came—one evening, when the three of us sat before the fire:

"Well—what do you think of my community," asked Didier.

"Since you ask me," I responded, ignoring Ruth's admonishing glance—"it seems to me you're mixing up rather badly, two principles that don't go together—the Single Tax idea, with your dream of a great, landed estate.

"Single Tax is wobbly enough, but the mixture is worse."

"H'm! you're frank! And what do you propose, as the land-solution?"

"What do I propose? . . that all property be held in common—but not by that piratic arrangement that we at present call 'The State' but——"

"By the Socialist State?" he broke in, ironically . . thinking he was hitting me. . .

"No—by the Anarchist State—a condition of human existence and coöperation as far beyond Socialism as Socialism is beyond your rotten Capitalism. . ."

"But Single Tax—let me put in a word——"

"I suspect this Single Tax of yours, because you rich fellows fall for it . . Fels, the big soap manufacturer, and you, and others——"

"But your Anarchist Commonwealth—it's so far off—" he persisted, pacifically, ignoring my insolent slur.

"My friend," I patronized, "it's not as far off as you think! . .

"Remember London's Iron Heel? . . and Upton Sinclair's prediction that the Big Change is at most, removed a decade hence?"

"Not without the transition-stage of Socialism—but before that, the saner methods of Single Tax——"

"Single Tax won't have an inning . . and, 'without the transition-stage of Socialism' as you phrase it,—soon the workers of the world, thoroughly class-conscious, will succeed in wrestling all the power away from you Capitalists."

"By what means?" asked Didier, stirring himself slightly from his mildness. . .

"Didn't I say 'wrested'? . . that means—by force—by direct action—sabotage . . yes, bloodshed!"

"And, when they've won?"

—"the world will fall under the direct management and govern-

ance of a Central Syndicate of Farmers, Coal Miners, Garment Workers and so forth——"

"The Lawmakers——"

"The shyster lawyers and crook politicians that at present mainly comprise the lawmaking bodies of the nations—all jerked about by the unseen wires of the political gangster——

"The sugar-bread military man who sends out the common men as soldiers to be mowed down like grass, while he stands, safe, far behind, watching through field glasses——

"All these will be swept aside!——"

I halted; my sustained declamatory effort rendering me breathless . . then I shouted:

"Syndicalism!—Expropriation!—Taking By Force!—That's what we mean! *Now You Know!*"

Didier was stung to vehemence at last.

"You'll find me behind the machine-gun that's pointed at you, Mr. Gregory!"

We stood up, facing each other; our noses close enough to bump, at one more step.

"And I," I cried, "will take that machine-gun away from you, turn it on you, and blow you to hell!" . .

Ruth had me by the arm, hauling me back.

Didier wheeled, strode off from me with even, small steps to the end of the hall,—hands firmly clenched behind his back he swung to a militant return. . .

"Come, Johnny, calm down, don't be a boor any more . . the little man's your host!" Ruth murmured hurriedly.

"Let him be my host!—to the devil with the social conventions that restrain a man's spirit of free expression——"

Advancing back at me like a small Napoleon—Didier—overhearing——

"Ruth—the boy's quite right! let us argue it out."

His calling me "the boy" nettled me further:

"Your model cottages that you tell me you're putting up, at those big mills you own—your old age pensions—your insurance policies for the workers financed by doles stolen from the workers' meager wages——

"How dare you call it 'The New Freedom'?—rather call it what it really is—'The New Slavery'—'The New Serfdom'——

"All your cant amounts to, *is this*—

"Not content to be their employer, you must be their landlord,—the owner of their very breaths next—give them a meter to breathe by!——"

Didier popped up on his toes oratorically; he slammed his fist down on the oak table.

"You're maligning my decentest intentions, and, by God, I won't endure it!"

"If you care to make it personal—here's more: you have a bunch of semi-radical grafters that come to you for money for mere palliatives—" I was charging untruthfully and wrathfully—"nauseously flattering you——"

But Didier was out of the door, trembling and white with rage . . slamming the door behind him.

. . . . . .

I started stamping toward the stairway.

"Where are you going?" asked Ruth.

"I'm leaving this God-damned House right away . . I'm packing my grip——"

"There are no trains till to-morrow afternoon."

"I'll—I'll start walking——"

"What bad little boys you are—both of you—showing off, strutting before the one woman present."

"Don't be conceited. . .

"I'm going back to New York to-morrow. . .

"Why did I ever consent to come up to this place! . .

"Good-night!!"

. . . . . .

I couldn't sleep. I had behaved abominably—and that too just after, an hour previously, Ruth had congratulated me on my good behavior, my new and to-her-unsuspected understanding of human nature and allowance for it.

I tossed about, wavering this way and that!

Didier was a pretty good fellow, after all. I ought to be ashamed of myself. The first thing in the morning I would go straight to him and apologize.

But he anticipated my apology, by tendering his: a knock at my door that very night—and he stood there! . .

A contest as to who should be the most courteous to the other.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gregory!—hope I haven't disturbed you."

"You needn't be sorry . . I'm disgusted with myself . . you're all right—and it's decent of you to come to me like this. . ."

. . . . . .

"The Spanish have a proverb," observed Ruth, "that there are three topics that must be avoided, to keep the peace, in any discussion—the other man's religion, the other man's politics, the other man's wife!"

"There wouldn't be any discussion at all, then!"

"And maybe it would be much better."

"What a static world it would be!"

. . . . . .

Didier, when he heard I was returning to New York, argued against it, urging me to stay on longer; our fight had curiously brought us into friendly rapport.

But I longed to be back in The Village again . . where I could see for myself what was going on in the office of "Free Earth" . . at The Fernando Center . . and in all the flats, studios and attics, and furnished rooms, that housed the friends I was accumulating—artists, writers, dreamers—a few of them soon to become noted; most of them to give up and pull in the collar of a job, and go out from the notice of the world. . .

It was a day as cold as the day on which I arrived at Tarleton Farms, that I was taken down to the local station, to meet the train —in the big, sliding car.

On one side of me sat sweet-faced, scholarly, good-hearted Ruth, and on the other, the same restive, pink-faced, smallish man with the whitish-tufted eyebrows—revealing the same life-bewilderment in his eyes.

And in front lounged the taciturn, anonymous chauffeur, the merest glint of humorous irony peeping from his eyes.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Nough was assuredly glad to see me back. . .

Good old New York. I had loved the City at first sight, as I still love it . . in spite of all that has been said against it by the

exterior bucolics, here, Life, Art, Beauty, burns at its intensest. . .

I visited Broadway again . . its fantastic, sky-dancing signs zig-zagging across the dark. . .

I was out in the fine, fresh air . . snowflakes cutting about me crisply—tiny, lacy multitudes of them riding obliquely in all directions on the lazy backs of small eddies of wind. . .

Walking, walking—in love with the City . . glad of its fine fight. Suppose I should be one of those who went under?—well it would have been a good fight, anyhow. . .

. . . . . .

New York's women . . the many fresh-faced girls and women that I passed among. . .

The first night of my return to New York I walked and walked among women. . .

I called to mind with satisfaction the sentiment I had expressed to Ruth about the multitude of women one had to choose from—in a great city.

"In New York, as in every big city—there are many women that it's possible to get acquainted with, to choose from, in a man's search for a final mate."

"You old polygamist—you make me sick talking of your 'Final Mate.' "

Ruth was right, in a measure. For, in longing for The One I longed for ALL. . . This I considered, walking along, that night.

Here was a beautiful one . . there went a gracious one . . a tall, lovely one . . a dainty, small one . . but, perhaps, on the next block or around the next few corners, others might blossom out of the snowy night, daintier and lovelier still. . .

The men, ugh! what a mass of silly, strutting, bifurcated boasters the males were! in their ugly clothes—affecting big, boomy gruffness of voice, to seem manly—to cover up their inward timidity that evinced itself in outward boldness and combativeness—their inward, terror-stricken, child's helpless need of women! . .

I guessed the women were on to them, though!

Women and girls in hotels, restaurants, residences, apartments, along the streets—listening to the men's boasting—with secret, affectionate ridicule—tolerance—feminine understanding, in their hearts!

Glad of their men's tense, strong, different bodies, needing constantly to be assuaged and relaxed by their feminine kindness of giving.

. . . . . .

The following morning, having left my completed poem, "The Mill," at Whellen's office, I started strolling back to the Village, assuring myself that on its publication in *The Agora* I would "wake up and find myself famous. . ."

That statement of Byron apropos of the effect the publication of the first canto of "Don Juan" on the public, stayed in my mind, ever cropping up. . .

At Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue, going on the tip of my toes from that hope of quick-coming fame, a lyric came to me. . .

The rattle of a rivetting machine on a new skyscraper in process of construction had brought a thought of machine guns to me: hence, a brief poem against War:

TO THE RULERS

When you've fulfilled the measure of your pride,
And your starved honor has been satisfied—
Some plowman, driving deep his lusty share,
Will strike a skull to daylight unaware—
One naked skull to stare up at the sky
And shake your kingdoms with its irony!

"Pretty fine! even if I do say it myself!"

An economic sense belatedly growing in me ratiocinated—

"Six lines. . . Munsey's will give you fifty cents a line for that —but old Dr. Ward, of *The Independent*, will give you a dollar a line." . .

"And *this* might be the poem that will win you your fame—copied in every newspaper,"—my thought spoke to me. . .

A poet has to be sanguine or he couldn't exist.

. . . . . .

A strange woman was going on just in front of me. I could not help noticing her. She wore sandals, and a loose-flowing gown exactly like a meal sack. She dangled a hat haphazardly in her hand. And her hair was bobbed in a day when bobbed hair, far

from being the fashion, brought street-notoriety to its possessor. . .

The strange woman's neck was dazzlingly white; her hands were nervous and shapely; her feet, small, as they worked ahead, clad in brown socks. The contour of her body shaping itself inside the meal-sack dress, evidenced trim lines. . .

Fascinated, I walked close behind; she went in at the door of a restaurant, further along Greenwich Avenue . . striding with a free, nonchalant air. . .

I stopped a minute, then followed her in.

When I saw her face to face her appearance startled me.

Her strong, large features resembled one of the Dutchmen of Rembrandt.

Trotter's Restaurant.

. . . . . .

There I repaired often for a good cup of coffee, and for the cosiness of the place, when I could no longer tolerate the coldness of my room.

In City rooming houses, most lodgers are out during the day, so the heat is stinted, during that time, being let on full blast, mornings and nights. . .

"Clara," I heard a belligerent Southern voice boom across the tables, to the trim Scotch waitress—"Clara, who-all's been confis-eatin' the menu-slips from these bill-o'-fares?"

I had—writing verse on their backs.

I had done the same, other days. This day I was scribbling out a poem entitled "In Debt."

Trotter approach me, following the Scotch waitress's silent, explanatory glance toward me——

"So you're the one that's been——"

Without a word, I handed him the poem.

IN DEBT

Each man a general debt to mankind owes
For all he is, all he enjoys, and knows—
So he who dares the least of men to ban
Is just so many stages less a man.

Mr. Trotter's face, neck, and bald head returned from angry, apoplectic beet-red to normal . . the few sparse hairs on the top of his head stopped their seeming to rise and quiver, sizzling with wrath. . .

A few days later Trotter assured me that he was treasuring the poem, pasted in a scrapbook he kept, filled with clippings of poems from the newspapers. He also assured me that he had taken the point home to himself, and that, whenever I needed, I could charge up meals at his place.

. . . . . .

I discovered that Trotter's Restaurant was an informal gathering place for Villagers. . .

One afternoon I detected a heavily bearded man watching me intently, from glittering eyes quite Mongol in their slant. . .

A stare is a stare, and, though I sensed that no impudence was meant, I was on the point of objecting because of the discomfort it brought, when he himself rose and cowboylike waddled across the room. . .

He extended a large, hairy hand. He smiled a crisp-moustached, red-lipped smile, showing three gold teeth.

"They've told me you're John Gregory. I'm Arnold Rankin, and, naturally, I'd like to know you better."

He had heard much about me, he explained.

Him I also knew by name and report. For he had lived with Baxter and Hildreth down in the Good Hope Colony, in Kentucky, and had constituted one of the group, when Baxter, never done with colonies—had inaugurated his communistic experiment for artists and writers, at Halcyon Hall. . .

"Mad—a religious and sex maniac both!" Baxter had denominated Rankin angrily, one morning, at Eden. . .

"Oh, Arnold's all right!" Hildreth put in, standing nearby, pretty in middy blouse and bloomers.

Glancing silent reproof at his wife, Baxter handed me a postcard he had just received from Rankin—the cause of his wrath. It read,

"Dear Penton: Every man, to be happy, should carry two women abreast, have an acre of land, and a cow"—a jocose salutation—quoted from Rosseau, that Baxter did not relish.

"Damn fool! writing such a sentence openly on the back of a post-

card, sending it to me—the Postal authorities!—fool might get himself into hot water!"

. . . . . .

It seemed that Rankin and Baxter had at first been bosom cronies in radicalism.

Rankin's people had had him tried for insanity, and the latter had won his acquittal chiefly through a funny turn in Baxter's testimony in his behalf. . .

Baxter, on the stand—the judge asking, did he, Baxter, as a literary man, think Rankin insane?

"Why, your Honor—he's no more crazy than I am!"

The whole room rocked with laughter, in which the judge himself tried in vain not to join—though quickly snatching himself back to dignity and vindicating the austerity of the law by hammering terrifically with his gavel for order, threatening to clear the room. . .

Rankin had himself joined in the fun.

The Judge, in dismissing the case, had sagely observed that no man with a sense of humor about himself could be quite mad enough to merit putting away.

. . . . . .

Arnold Rankin was in search of a room in the Village. I conducted him to Mrs. Nough's. . .

. . . . . .

Mrs. Nough was glad for my having brought her a prompt, regular-paying lodger—Rankin received remittances from home, "to keep him away," he merrily suggested.

Mrs. Nough was pleased, but she was puzzled by Rankin.

"Johnny Gregory," she stopped me in the upper hallway—"though he pays up, prompt, each week, I'd like to ask you what kind of nut that fellow is, you brought me, several weeks ago?"

"He may be a nut, but," I went on, stressing the point I knew would impress her most—"but he comes of a good old Virginia family—what they call an F. F. V."

She sighed, somewhat relieved . . expanding . . then her eyes sparkled with puzzled resentment again.

"I've no settled objection to nuts—you know that—" she expostulated, "I've had piles of them here, off and on . . and some paid their room rent, and some didn't——

"But here's a chap don't tumble out of bed till early afternoon . . and then what does he do," Mrs. Nough was heartily plainspoken at times—"then what does he do but squat down on his bare butt on the carpet, and sit for several hours more, reading letters—love letters they must be—" evidently, by the guilty pause in her voice, she had been poking into them, during Rankin's absence—"and my daughter—only sixteen,—she makes the beds for me now, you know——

"She got a terrible shock, walking right in on him!——

"Well, what are you laughing at?—it's no laughing matter for a young girl to see such sights!"

. . . . . .

"Let the old girl come in herself, then,—or see to it that I'm not disturbed till I'm through,"—Rankin was squatting on the floor, hairy-legged, in his shirt tail, playing a sort of solitaire, the cards being packets of love letters which he tied and untied, shifted and re-assorted . . just as Mrs. Nough had described him. . .

"*Jenny*—if she had not grown fatter every time I saw her."

Setting *her* pile aside, neatly retied. . .

"And *Eunice*—" taking up and untieing the packet of letters "Eunice" had written him—"I lost her, I am thoroughly convinced, by not turning the right phrase, at the right time—in a letter I wrote in answer to—THIS ONE!" pointing with an index finger, and rambling on in further amorous speculation. . .

"But the finest woman I ever had—Jerry—and the homeliest!"

"Was she one of 'The Two-Abreast' that you 'carried' down in Florida?"

"She was," answered Rankin.

"The wife or the sweetheart?"

"The sweetheart . . my wife, from whom I've just received my final decree of divorce—my wife though rather pretty, couldn't hold a candle to her."

"How did your experiment work out?"

"Not at all, in the practical sense.

"I hid behind the door, when my wife looked for me . . I came out of my hiding place for Jerry——

"Oh, I say, drop in at Trotter's this afternoon around tea-time.

"Jerry herself's in town . . she's having tea with me at Trotter's, at four."

"You said—she was—homely?"

"It's a great pity—her homeliness . . otherwise, I don't think there's a finer woman in the world."

I turned in the doorway, a thought coming to me——

"Speaking of homely women!"—and I described the strange Socratic-looking woman in the meal-sack gown, sandals, bobbed hair. . .

"That's Janice Godman, the radical schoolteacher and dress-reformer.

"She's really a great woman.

"I'll give you a knock-down to her, the next time she's in Trotter's."

. . . . . .

"This is Jerry!"

I caught the extended, white, dainty hand, moist in the palm and fair—so different from the face I looked into. And even then it was not till her radiant, good-natured smile had faded that I perceived Jerry's utter homeliness—her upper teeth jutting forth again.

. . . . . .

Whellen was urging me to write more narrative poetry.

I had sold him an anti-war lyric, "The Men that Never March Again." . .

" 'The Elite' has recently acquired a new editor, a brilliant young fellow from the West. He's making that magazine over into something alive and vigorous again . . go over and sell him a narrative poem."

"There's no use going to see him till I have something finished."

"He'll pay you well . . I've already spoken to him about you."

. . . . . .

"Did you like Jerry?" asked Rankin.

"She has a nice personality."

"Look her up . . even though she has been my sweetheart . . I'm a good anarchist!

"She's lonely.

"Here's her telephone number. . ."

. . . . . .

Jerry, too, enjoyed a remittance from home.

She lived in a rather pretentious room-and-alcove off Central Park West.

It is a rooming house convention, that occupants of but one room are not allowed to receive visitors of the opposite sex there.

But if there is an adjoining space, apart from the bed—even an alcove, *that* convention loses its force and application.

Jerry occupied a room with an alcove.

The first time I went to see her, it was after midnight when we finished reading and discussing Tolstoy's "What Is Art?" . .

Leaving her, I was on the point of inviting her to have chop suey with me at a nearby Chinese restaurant, the electric sign of which I had noticed up a side street on my way to her lodging.

But my pride balked.

Because of her homely face, I was ashamed to be seen with her, even by people who did not know me.

. . . . . .

Two evenings later I was to see her again.

She lent me "What Is Art?" to take with me, and read. . .

I had a fine time loafing with the book and perusing it lazily.

No, I would not go back and see Jerry again.

Nothing intimate must happen between us.

If she was too homely for me to be seen abroad with—I would be the veriest cad to take her for my physical ease . . it would be neither decent nor fair. . .

I would mail the book back, instead of returning it in person,—the collusive excuse of mutual passion for another meeting.

But, the evening and the hour drew near for my seeing her the second time. And the fever of my pulses mounting higher, swept my resolution away, and I went. . .

. . . . . .

Instead of that soft, natural meeting and mating of mouth with mouth, that velvet pairing and slow and complete fusion of lips tasting sweet with passion, our kiss was a thin-lipped affair of clicking ivory. Her teeth clicked in against mine, and repelled me.

But the brute desire in me, so long pent-up, demanded satisfaction.

As seldom as I might, without giving the fine, sensitive, homely girl cause for offense—as seldom as I might I kissed her on the mouth.

Her eyes were hazel, and long-lashed, and I kissed *them* instead; and her neck and breasts . . it was no effort, putting my lips to the fine texture of her skin. . .

Her exquisite, slim body was surprising—ankles, wrists, arms, legs, torso, rounded to beautiful perfection.

If it had not been for the homeliness of her face!

I pressed my cheek close to her cheek to keep from seeing or looking into her face at all. . .

. . . . . .

We lay inert, side by side. . .

Jerry's eyes started wide open, a sort of terror in them.

She turned to me.

She asked me abruptly, "What are you thinking about?"

I had been thinking how ugly she was—and how much—at the present moment, I desired to run from her.

"It doesn't matter what I'm thinking about,—does it?"—putting her off.

"It DOES matter . . I must know."

She was enlarging the question into a troublesome issue.

"Let's talk some more about Tolstoy!"

"No—you're evading," she persisted, "with your brain hot and close against mine,—I felt,—just then,—you were thinking something not nice about me."

She thrust against me with her hands as I tried to draw her back into my embrace. . .

She leapt up, swift . . she burst into a bitter fit of tears. . .

"*I know! . . you were thinking how ugly I am!*"

"Why, Jerry," I lied, "you're crazy to accuse me of such things! I assure you—please come back to me again."

. . . . . .

One evening, a jolly, chattering group flailed rowdily into Trotter's while I was sitting alone at a table—flailed in, with the woman whom Rankin had identified as Janice Godman . . herself, as usual, in sandals, going at a flat, sliding, easy stride.

Accompanying her were two men and two women:

The two men wore close-clipped reddish beards; one, with glints of grey in the reddishness—the tallest of the two—massive-shouldered, the possessor of a jovial, shattering laugh. . .

The other, though well-built, slender because of small bones . . his face too sensitive for practical life, if it had not been for his deep-set, quizzical eyes. . .

The voice of the robust, great-shouldered chap reverberated lustily.

He was hard at a rather frank story, snatches of which I caught now and again, interspersed with the quick whirr of the slenderer man's ironic comments. . .

The two women accompanying Miss Godman:—the one was drab in a grey, rather pretty-faced manner; but her coal-black eyes shot lights about that belied the primness of her face. She was dressed in well-tailored, almost mannish fashion. . .

The second woman was dressed in Miss Godman's slack manner, after the prevalent idea in dress-reform . . her face was round, and rosy,—seemed at first glance,—jolly . . but the pupils of her eyes, expanding and contracting hectically, lent a spattered effect to her personality . . those eyes groping as if the soul floundered within through an inextricable spiritual morass—or as if it was caught in a net yielding just so far this way and that, ultimately holding firmer than fine-woven wires of steel.

. . . . . .

They had launched into a discussion that I longed to join.

Several times I had met Miss Godman's eyes, when my friend Arnold Rankin swung into the restaurant, pushing the door open in front of him with his cane, a lordly affectation of his.

"Hello, Gregory!"

He touched me with the end of his cane, in off-handed, insolent greeting. I brought him to rights with a curse—"Damn it, Rankin, I don't like people to touch me with their canes, or their hands, either!"

He insisted that he had meant nothing but informal friendliness.

"After this then, be just as friendly, but be a little less informal."

I couldn't be angry long.

Half-gorilla, half-gentleman, he ambled over to a chair on the opposite side of the table, flinging an expensive, soft, velour hat upward unerringly to a hook, hanging his cane below it, on the shorter hook by means a languid, upward stretch of arm. . .

Having forgiven him:

"Rankin—isn't that Janice Godman over there?"

"Yes, that's Janice, all right!"

"Come on—introduce me. . ."

"Janice, here's a friend who's been pestering me a long time to introduce him to you——"

"So long as YOU don't PESTER me——" Janice cut back with a sharp drawl, warning glints in her eyes, like the points of rapiers. . .

"Why—why—Janice—"—Rankin, taken aback——

"Run on, before I light into you—and just leave your friend behind. I know who he is already. I needed no introduction. I like his poetry. I think I shall like him . . but, as for you——"

But Rankin had slipped away, caught down his cane and hat, hurried out. . .

I stood pondering whether I ought not to resent my friend's treatment, and also leave—when Janice Godman's hand was interwoven into mine—like one child, playing with another——

"Don't you be offended, Johnny Gregory—Rankin got what he deserved . . I'll explain when I get around to it.

"In the meantime, sit down and play with us."

"Yes, SET down and play with us!" bade the robust, bearded man ungrammatically, seizing me by the wrist, and, at the same time, jocosely fetching me an unexpected jerk backward into a chair that luckily was firmly there to receive my unbalanced bulk. . .

Janice Godman soon "got around" to making clear why she had bawled out Arnold Rankin.

She made clear her attitude toward him, not only to the immediate group, but, incidentally to several other people—strangers—who were there.

She disliked Rankin because, she averred,—under the cloak of Radicalism, he went about imposing on the hearts and affections of women who, for their part, were honestly trying to accept, and live up to, the new freedom in sex. . .

"If he would be the frank, sexual beast he really is—that in itself would prove an extenuation to his conduct——"

But his talk was one long whine against the women with whom he had lived.

No matter what tricks he played on them, it was always they who misused him—listen to him talk! . .

"And every time he walks into a room where there's an attractive woman, he makes her shrink, stripping her bare with his eyes!" . .

"Janice, don't be malicious!"

"I cherish no malice against him. But I do insist on seeing him as he is, and on letting him know it! as I do with all my friends and acquaintances—as I expect all my friends and acquaintances to do with me!"

. . . . . .

Unadvisedly I exclaimed, our weird flurry of the week before forgotten——

"Jerry, at last I've found 'my own people' "—telling of the people that gathered at Trotter's.

The next instant I was sorry.

Straightway she took up——

"I'd like to meet that bunch, too . . Arnold would take me, if I asked him, but under the circumstances, I think you should. . .

"I know nobody in the City besides Rankin and you——" her voice dropped—"Sometimes I grow desperate from lonesomeness—!"

I paused, embarrassed. She had given me the cue, practically the command, to volunteer to take her to Trotter's, and introduce her.

I could not, my vanity rising against it.

I temporized——

. . . . . .

"You look weary and battered this evening."

Jerry fondly stroked my face.

Though I deferred taking her to Trotter's, hating to be known as having a homely sweetheart, this did not keep me from weakly returning to her, again and again——

I had crept to her, that evening, in one of my rare, whipped moods. In one of my infrequent moods of acceptance of defeat. Of course, I would, on the next upward wave of temperament, cast off that mood for some mountain-peak of exultation as absurd.

"Life's got me on the run, Jerry!"

"Tell me all about it, dear!"

"For the last three weeks, every last poem that I've sent out has come back—or that I have personally taken around to the magazine offices. . . I've held up Trotter for three weeks—and Mrs. Nough——"

"It's a pity you poets haven't capital to fall back on, or rating like business men—who take advantage of the credit system, and nothing is thought of it! . .

"But, never mind, there's always plenty of food about, here . . and, if the worst comes, you can move in and stay here with me——" continuing, with despairing humor—"Since you're here most of every night, anyhow!"

"I couldn't, Jerry—I couldn't do that."

"Yes, you could," then, "—I think a bit of defeat's good for your soul—now and then . . it's only when you're in trouble that your face looks whittled clear and keen. . .

"You're one of the kind that should never quite succeed. . .

"But the tenacity, the brass, in you—I'm afraid some day it will carry you over for a real American success!"

. . . . . .

It was nothing short of a miracle, what I observed in Jerry . . watching her face, instead of avoiding the sight of it—I saw it suffused with ecstasy . . there shone forth a light, a loveliness that broke through for the moment. . .

Then I comprehended for the first time what it is that men find alluring in plain and homely women that they have for wives and sweethearts.

. . . . . .

"Look here, Rankin, it's none of your business—my relationship with Jerry—I refuse to speak about it——"

Rankin had come up to my room to talk over the situation. He had evidently heard Jerry's side. He had entered the door like a man with a grave mission, had delivered himself of the opinion that I should, in relation to Jerry, "behave more like a good radical."

. . . . . .

"Since you come to see me for one thing alone—since you never take me out any place with you——"

"Jerry, you must know how busy writing I am, when I'm not up here!" looking guiltily away from her.

"—you don't seem to bother about your work . . you stay here for hours at a time——"

"—because it's nice to be with you——"

"If it's nice to be with me," she persisted for the hundredth time,

"why don't you take me where other people are?—why don't you take me to places?"

"Because I don't like other people about, when you and I are together."

"Arnold Rankin sees you often at Trotter's."

"Why don't you get Rankin to take you there?—to meet the bunch?" I bade brutally.

"NO!" she was determined—"It's your place to do it . . I want *you* to."

But I still put off,—evaded.

"Going to Trotter's" with me became a demand that obsessed her.

. . . . . .

Strolling into that place, one afternoon, I was considerably taken aback, to come upon Jerry sitting there, beside Rankin.

Instead of echoing implied rebuke—all humble, the tone of her voice actually took on an intimation of apology for her being there.

She was for avoiding the making a point of the situation . . but,—leave that to Rankin——

"Johnny, sit down and let's talk it over!" he bade openly and blandly.

"Talk what over?" I answered with hostility.

"Sh!" Jerry's pretty, white hand flexed coaxingly over Rankin's hairy paw dispread on the white tablecloth.

Strangely enough—I was inwardly jealous of her hand on his.

. . . . . .

The time had come, when, for what little self-respect I had left, I must not go back to Jerry.

For another week I stuck it out, not going. . .

Then—I was there, knocking, and could hardly wait for her to open the door . . despising myself. . .

"No! No!—that's all over—all done with—just friends!"

It did not take over-much effort to break down her vociferous, tearful resistance. . .

. . . . . .

"O, Johnny—try to love me! you must love me—a little—NOW!"

"Jerry—from the first I thought we agreed that there was to be no mention of love . . that it was because we both had physical need——"

"Agreed? I don't care what we agreed on——"

She wrenched herself away.

"If you touch me again, you brute—I'll—I'll kill you!" she cried out, in a changed, deepened voice of great dignity. . .

Her swift transition startled me. I had never seen its like. She sat apart on a chair, and I dared not approach her.

Then, as swiftly her dignity dwindled back to its pristine feminine weakness, and she announced—"after this—you'll never find me home—when you come——" silent tears of mortal hurt streaming down her face—"unless"—(I thought she was going to say "Unless you can love me a little"—but instead she ended dolefully)——

"Unless you promise that you'll 'take me to places' with you!"

That was the last time we were together.

If ever there was a time when I wished to be decent, to comfort—it was then. . .

A pretty woman, weeping, is a far from attractive sight. . .

But the forlorn girl looked so doubly homely, weeping,—that all I could do—was—walk out and never come back again.

. . . . . .

One late afternoon a great group of us, gathered together at Trotter's,—from our studios, furnished rooms, attics, apartments . . spreading out around several tables.

It was a Spring day of unusual mildness. . .

Our rising voices and rallying laughter drew the attention of a gang of boys playing outside. . .

They peered in at us through the screen door.

"Hey, fellers, there's a woman in there smoking a cigarette!"

"—Pipe the big guy with the beard!"

"ALL the women are smokin'!"

Especially seeing women smoking created in them an excitement so frantic and hysterical that the more daring of the gang of boys began to race up against the screen door,—flinging it open,—letting it bang to . . rushing back with whoops,—to renew the assault. . .

Daddy Trotter, apoplectic with indignation, shot out after them, caught the first boy he could lay hands on by the scruff of the neck, clapped him vigorously a dozen times about the ears. . .

"I'll teach you to break my screen door!"

Out rushed the stout-bellied, smallish tailor from the next door but one . . in his half-buttoned vest . . to interfere. . .

"Meester Drotter, you musdt nodt abuse de little boy!"

"You get back into your shop, sir, (whack!) and mind your own business, sir, (whack! whack! whack!) or I'll clout you about the ears, next,—sir!"

The tailor, still protesting, but putting safe stance between himself and Trotter—backed clumsily and fearfully into his shop, his unused goose in his hand.

. . . . . .

Slackly roaming here, and there, and round-about, like some unhappy, lost animal—since I went no more to see Jerry I suffered an intensification of that habit—of that corroding restlessness compounded of dissatisfaction with myself and the continual, questing ache of the temporary celibate.

There is no peace for the blowing leaf,
The end of its journey it never knows!—I wrote

. . . . . .

Usually, on first turning out of bed in the morning, I was capable of at least two hours of consecutive work, before the ache of body and spirit began . . now, for a while, even this respite was lost. . .

In my despair I asked myself why I didn't force myself to go about with Jerry; to take her as my permanent mate? . .

In time I should have grown used to her homeliness . . then I would at least have had a woman's constant affection.

. . . . . .

A map of my progress about the environs of the Village and the City, would have afforded interesting evidence and illustration of my emotional derangement. . .

I would talk long with Rankin, if he were up—finding him squat on the carpet, sorting his love letters . . would sit trying to read poetry in Washington Square Park, thoughts of women coming between me and the page . . I would order books that I never opened, at The Public Library; meaning to study hard for hours, but falling, instead, into a daydream of women; or of fame and success . . my eyes would wander off from one girl to another, in the large reading room. . .

I took long lonely, desperate walks up the Palisades, I rode for hours on the ferry . . fighting the madness down, the lacking frenzy. . .

Now I considered Cicero right, in his De Senectute, when he praised old age as the best time of life, because it brought respite from the pursuing œstrus of passion. . .

. . . . . .

Without caring—even loathing—to speak to any one at all—I would visit every one I knew. . .

There was my new friend, Janice Godman, who lived around the corner from where I had my furnished room . . she lived in a five-room apartment on the top floor of an unimproved tenement house. . .

I would find her in, mornings, up to nine o'clock. . .

"Busted" too, as well as sick-spirited—I started the habit of bumming quarters from her, with which to stake myself to breakfast, and the morning paper. . .

Always she would reach me the quarter, remarking that it was too bad a fine poet like myself didn't enjoy a small but steady income. . .

"Janice, I know I'm an awful bum!"

"No matter, my boy! I know you have a future!

"I believe in you because you're essentially religious——

"O, no! I don't mean in any orthodox way——

"There's one of your poems I frequently quote—to each new class in English Lit.——

TO GOD, THE ARCHITECT

Who thou art I know not,
But this much I know—
Thou hast set the Pleiades
In a silver row;
Thou hast sent the flaming suns
Loose upon their way——
Thou hast reared a colored wall
'Twixt the night and day——
Thou hast made the flowers to blow
And the stars to shine;

'Hid rare gems and richest ores
In the tunneled mine;
But chief of all thy wondrous works,
Supreme of all thy plan,
Thou hast put an upward reach
In the heart of Man!"

. . . . . .

So it was to Janice's I went when I felt troubled . . which was often. . .

If Janice had gone for the day's teaching, "Billy," her robust, plain-spoken protégée would be in. . .

From bumming occasional quarters, I got to arriving in time for breakfast. . .

Also lunch or tea would be mine for the asking. . .

Professor of English Literature, specializing in the teaching of poetry—Janice had a fine library of all the English Poets.

There I'd lose myself mornings and afternoons on end. . .

When Janice came slinging in from her classes—frankly—it would be either——

"Now, you'll have to go, Johnny"—or "Johnny, you'd better stay on for supper . . I have some interesting people I'd like you to meet"—or again—"come on! we're going over to Trotter's for dinner and meet the bunch."

Through the fine friendliness of Janice, my circle of friends and acquaintances gradually widened. . .

Outspoken "Billy" Saunders, Janice's protégée—myself standing and knocking at the door,—she opening to me——

"Hello, Billy, may I come in for a while?"

"Sure, Johnny—come in!"

"Billy" Saunders would be in her customary knickers, wearing a shirt like a man's . . a big, lusty, keen-eyed, observant girl who, like Janice, didn't hesitate to let her tongue go.

In moments of lessened confidence in myself I would talk and talk volubly . . sometimes sillily. . .

"You run on like a victim of echolalia!"—Billy sharply observed, more than once—"you're noisy like a cockatoo and your hair is crested in a ridge like a cockatoo's crest." . .

"Talking jags," Janice dubbed them . . "we all go on them, from time to time—but you—worst of any!"

. . . . . .

In explanation of the change that had come over the *National Magazine*, Whellen had directly charged, in conversation with me, that Lephil, its formerly Progressive Editor, and his associate group of editors—had felt the heavy fist of Morgan because of their series of audacious muckraking articles—but particularly because of Penton Baxter's attack on New York's Financial and Society Life in his recent Novel—"The City"—which had been widely announced as a new feature for *The National*. . .

. . . . . .

It was after the publication of the first few chapters of "The City" that they reversed their policy. . .

Whether Whellen's statement was true ar not, it was noteworthy that after the second installment of "The City"—previously touted to the point of utmost sensationalism—the editors had swiftly drawn in their horns and, deprecatively, swiftly and silently suspended further publication of Baxter's book. . .

I was gossipy enough to repeat to Lephil what Whellen had said about him and his associates——

Lephil, losing his temper, to my delight—called Whellen "that Little John Lane," with an angry laugh . . at any rate, I'm not a social upstart, trying to make society by publishing books and setting myself up as a patron of literary men!

"But what else did he say?"

"That you, personally, had sold yourself out for a salary of ten thousand dollars a year."

Lephil flew into a rage such as I had never suspected the tall, well-groomed clubman capable of. . .

I had stirred him out of his usual academic calm—my aim. .

"Then why," I presumed to inquire, "did you drop Baxter's 'City'?"

He wheeled on me irritably.

"What do you want to know for?"

"I'd like to know the right of it—if Whellen is wrong!" I prodded slyly. . .

Lephil, seeing through me, decided to brush his anger aside. He smiled brightly.

"I'll tell you; it's an amusing story.

"In the first place, Baxter's knowledge of the inner workings of New York Society Life proved utterly false, not to say fatuous."

"But I thought the papers said he got a job as butler?"

"'As butler?' Young man, it takes training to get such a job, training and credentials—it's easier to get a job as editor," enjoying his own humor.

"No, Penton didn't get a job as butler——"

"Instead, he was made the victim of a gross practical joke——"

"Baxter was out at Cliffside-on-the-Hudson, paying a visit to Lucian Wolter, the producer, and the well known actress, Flora Minturn—Wolter's wife. . .

"While there he naïvely laid before them his problem—he wished to expose in his forthcoming novel 'The City"—the fast life and general corruption of New York Society—and didn't know just how to go about procuring the exact inside information—the data needed to render his book plausible and accurate.

"Wolter promised to help him, avowing that he was *in* with the Smart Set—mischievously cast about in his mind——

"He finally fixed things up with a certain wealthy broker, a friend of his, who had a bent for practical jokes—to stage a supposed orgy at the latter's house on Long Island—an orgy seemingly participated in by all the élite of New York's most exclusive set . . with different actors and actresses of their acquaintance impersonating, say, the Goulds, the Vanderbilts, etc.

"Baxter was let in on the party, after much secrecy and seeming difficulty.

. . . . . .

"He stood about, credulous-eyed, noting the wild behavior of society.

"Privately dotting down what he observed, I suppose, in his notebook!——

"Of course, *we* knew nothing about this—and, though some of the resultant descriptions seemed dubious, we took it for granted that a man of Baxter's reputation, especially after the success of his 'Slaughter House' exposé—must know what he was about!"

"When we discovered the hoax, we simply dropped publication of the rest of 'The City'——

"That's what your 'Duodecimo John Lane' speaks of, as our 'About Face.' "

. . . . . .

But I had, primarily, come to the office of *The National* to sell them a poem. And I was now referred by Lephil to their "new poetry-man," a recent graduate from Harvard. . .

From one of the many cubby-holes in the busy office, Halton Mann, the new poetry editor, rose solidly to greet me.

"I'm glad to have this chance of meeting you, Gregory!"

The huge, genial, broad-faced youth presented the hulking appearance of a full-grown bear, yet still, somehow, in spite of its growth, a powerful cub that life had not yet licked into shape. . .

He plunged headlong, on a wave of savage, undisciplined sincerity——

"Gregory, I think most of your verse is rotten—and it's time some one flung that fact in your teeth; then you might get wise to yourself and go after poetry harder and better.

"It's the occasional flashes of power and glimmers of dawning greatness in your verse that make me want to know you—and encourage you——"

I looked Mann over. I liked his frankness. At the same time I slightly resented his advice.

"What I also value in you, Gregory, is your determination to be a poet, and a poet alone—not a sub-editor—like myself, nor an advertising man, trying to do poetry on the side—like so many of our American poets——

"I also like immensely your not going out primarily after money."

He thrust several sheets of typewritten paper into my hands that I recognized as poems I had sold to *The National* before his incumbency.

"But these have been accepted and paid for?" I protested. . .

"I don't care! . . if Siddon showed bad taste in buying them—that's his funeral. They can't go into the magazine while I'm here."

He went on to say that I mustn't take it hard—that if I were so-and-so (mentioning a certain prolific and popular versifier by

name) he would "shoot back every last thing I did"—as he did "with that fellow's"—unread, merely transferred from one envelope to the one that returned the mss.!

"But, no matter who the poet—that's rather unfair, don't you think?"

"Sure, it's unfair! . . I *mean* to be unfair—shall always be—toward any man who boasts, as this fellow has—of the money he makes by verse turned out like sawing cordwood! . .

"By God, I'd shoot back another Ode to a Nightingale—if it came from that fellow!"

Fortunately, however, the poem I had just brought in, appealed to Mann, was accepted by him.

"Better than your usual run—sorry I can't name the price, too! You want your check right away?" He sent me to Lephil. . . Walking out and passing his cubby-hole on the way.

"Hey, Gregory—how much did Lephil give you?"

"Eight dollars."

"What?" exclaimed Mann, astonishment written large on his face, "eight dollars?—to a well-known poet like you? If they can't pay more they at least ought to have the decency not to *take* it!"

"It was only ten lines long, you know."

"—makes no difference, the length! They pay hundreds of dollars for prose that's rotten—mere hack-work . . why shouldn't they pay better for a *real* poem?"

"Mr. Mann," I advised—liking him tremendously—"be careful! You're talking loud enough for Lephil and Siddon to overhear."

"I hope they do! I'm going to camp on their trail till they get into the habit of deducting a little from what they pay to the hashers of verbal tripe and punk illustrators, and adding it to their poetry budget."

. . . . . .

"Come in, Silly!" Janice called to me, halting tentatively in the doorway of her apartment, "don't stand there peering at us like a bird—all shining eyes and a nose?"

Then, to the girls that sat about on her couch—six of them—"Girls, this is the poet Johnny Gregory—" there was a rustle and flutter among them—"but look out for him, when I'm not around . .

he's an interesting talker—but not the kind that carries a wedding ring about in his vest pocket."

I was furious, but contrary to my wont, hid my fury till a time more opportune—till the girls had left.

I would be dignified, this time.

. . . . . .

Janice was interested in helping out girls . . in teaching them how to become economically independent.

She privately conducted what she called an "occupational clinic" for them—discussing with them what kind of jobs they would like to have, or were best fitted for . . she kept a list of employments open . . more than once she helped girls out of her own pocket.

. . . . . .

"Janice"—when the girls had gone—"you and all my other friends, must learn to treat me with more courtesy . . and I'm not," I further protested, "after any of your High School girls!"

"My boy,—people are treated only with the dignity they command by their behavior. . .

"As for the girls—don't tell me you're not after them . . all men are!"

"If you feel that way about me, I won't come here any more."

"Johnny, I won't let you stay away! Besides these girls of mine are able to take care of themselves!"—she had advised them about sex. . .

. . . . . .

Events, of course, did not crowd one upon the other, though I set them down so here.

This does not mean that I am deliberately misrepresenting what happened to me.

In my daily existence there were long, slack stretches of days and weeks as regards exterior incidents,—which I find difficult to portray . . those times of the body's inaction which herald the spirit's intensest action, and the mind's greatest motion. . .

. . . . . .

Janice was famous for her impromptu dinner parties. . .

A dinner party at Janice's,—the first one that I attended, arriving long before any of the other guests. . .

"Billy, what the devil am I to do?" Janice asked, of her big, hand-

some, strapping protégée, whose cheeks were round and ruddy, like Hood River apples—"here I've gone and invited fully twenty people already, running into them about town—and we've room for fourteen, at the most. . .

"Besides, it's within half an hour of the time set for their arrival, and there's nothing, yet, for them to eat, in the house."

"Of course there isn't!" responded Billy, in a resounding, thwacking voice—"how could there be, when you didn't say a word about it, up to now—to me?"

Janice slumped in despair on the couch——

"But, come on, Janice—don't pull an act!" Billy continued, "for you know well enough that you have a couple of wooden trestles and some planks in the storeroom . . and you know well enough you're going to send Johnny Gregory, here—out—for loaves of bread, cans of spaghetti, and a pail of beer!"

Lighting a cigarette, taking a deep puff,—holding the cigarette off and inspecting the end of it abstractedly——

"Sometimes Billy," remarked Janice, to Billy indirectly, though speaking at me—"sometimes Billy rather exceeds herself, like all forceful, practical characters who know their own minds too well!" her voice at first crisp with anger, swung back to its soft, velvety drawn—"it must be frightful, mustn't it, Johnny, to know your own mind thoroughly, at all times, about all things—not to speak of other's minds—as dear Billy does!"

She handed me a five-dollar bill.

"—however, I guess we'd better follow Billy's suggestion:

"—Get four or five loaves of bread . . about fifteen cans of spaghetti, large size, Van Camp's . . three pounds of butter"—was Janice's haphazard commission. . .

"And when you return, Billy'll have the big tin water pail ready for the beer."

I chaffed and fumed inwardly. I hated running errands.

My second trip was for a huge, shiny pail of beer, brimming and slopping over on the ten flights of stairs,—all the way up.

"Johnny,—you help me out with the boards and the wooden horses!"

I was sorry I had come the earliest.

"In a few minutes we'll have a dinner fit for any one."

"God knows, the bunch don't come here for food, but for the discussion,—or I'd pity them!" remarked Billy Saunders, opening the cans of spaghetti in the kitchen.

. . . . . .

By ones, twos, threes, Janice's guests climbed up the stairs.

For there waited no easy elevator to whisk them to the top.

Instead, there was laborious mounting to each weary landing of interminable about-and-about stairways . . up, up, where scores of ranged, empty milk bottles stood in file, soldiering the landings; and where outside vistas of dun, ill-smelling areas and criss-cross lines of wash took the eye: overalls straightening, nightgowns and shirts swelling and ballooning in the air.

According to the spirits within them,—some came up light-footed and gay over the long climb; others came grumbling and out of breath, execrating the barbarity of the interminable ascent: "like climbing the tower of Notre Dame"——

"Coming up to my apartment is like the progress of the soul—or as we hope the progress of the soul must be—a long, tortuous climb, difficult step after step—but at the top you burst out into the sky everywhere——"

This was what Janice said, when we sat on the roof of the house—under the stars, one summer night.

. . . . . .

"One—two—three . . eighteen out of twenty-four—not such a bad average"—Janice, impersonally counting heads. . .

"Bring on the spaghetti, Billy."

Billy, appearing from the kitchen—clad in knickers, wool stockings, a heavy checkered shirt such as lumbermen wear——

"It's not done yet, Janice! . . if you'll only discuss the cosmos ten minutes longer——"

. . . . . .

"Some of you folks will have to double up on knives——"

"Just as long as it's not forks."

"This is what I call a regular picnic, though without the grass and the trees——"

—"And the bugs, beetles, mosquitoes, and ants!" added a realist.

Here I put in with a wretched pun about there having to be room for fifteen, instead of fourteen if we ate in the open air.

"Who else would you expect?"

"Al Fresco!" I responded, to be rebuked by general whistling, groaning, booing. . .

One method I had of making my friends like me was giving them a chance to feel superior . . or giving them an opening for a witty remark at my expense. . .

"To think a poet would be capable of such a pun!"

"Just the one you'd expect bad puns from . . read Keats' letters . . he puns like a sophomore. . ."

"And Charles Lamb—at his little gatherings in his rooms at Grey's Inn."

"But the pun was already in bad odor—even then. . . Addison, fifty years before, attacked its use as a form of humor,—in the Spectator."

"A childish verbal trick at the best!"

"Homer is suspected of occasional punning, by scholars who know."

"Shakespeare's marring of his plays—his punning and humor, the saddest in all literature . . only a German critic could find humor in the punning of his clowns——"

"—And how about Mercutio? . . dying . . saying, with his last breath nearly,—"This is a grave matter. . ."

"Mis-quoted: the exact words—Mercutio: 'Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.' "

. . . . . .

People well known; others whose fame was already in the making, liked the brisk informality of Janice's parties, and frequented them.

That evening there were present: a Commissioner of Immigration; a professor of Italian from Columbia; a celebrated economist and sociologist; a well-known cubist painter; several women magazine writers and journalists; several other poets besides myself; and others——

Even more at Janice's than at Trotter's, there was no subject under the sun that we feared to discuss, with excited interest . . conversationally glancing from one topic to another. . .

At Janice's there would be no outsider within hearing radius, as there might happen to be, in a public restaurant.

During the evening we battled verbally over Socialism, Syndicalism, Guild-Socialism; the ethics and morals of the dance, from the Australian tribal dance to the Waltz that Byron attacked in his satyric poem of that name—and to the Fox Trot, Bunny Hug, and Turkey Trot; Havelock Ellis; perversion and inversion; the toleration of the Homosexual; the late book of Moll's on the sex-life of the child . . Freud and his new discoveries.

From which we jumped to the adolescent life of the Great,—starting with Rosseau's Confessions; then the talk diverged—we discussed the famous people of the Past—their private lives, their personal peculiarities—in the vein that Strachey, Bradford, and Doctor Collins have since made popular in their books. . .

"All this, when the best is said for it, is nothing else but gossip—even if it does happen to be about people who are both dead and—"

"I maintain that all gossip—if it's intelligent—both about the dead and the living, the known and the unknown—is justified . . it's a healthy human instinct we have, to inspect the lives and doings of people—of our friends, too!"

"Never in the world!" dissented several voices.

"I'll admit that there is a point of discrimination," Janice pursued. "There are two kinds of gossip: there's the mean, small kind in which no decent person indulges; and there's the legitimate kind, of which all literature, more or less, is an exalted example——

"Creative Gossip, let's call it!" Janice paused, beaming happily over the felicitous phrase she had coined. . .

"No—Gossip *is* gossip, and it's nasty—no matter how you try to slide over the fact—whether about the dead or the living, the famous or one's friends," Jarl Loring, the musical critic protested.

"Would you call all discussion of great men's lives—gossip?"

"*I* would!"

"Then all biography, autobiography, memoirs—must go into the discard."

"Creative Gossip! . . why, in a truly civilized community, nobody should object to *anything* said about him—" Janice pushed the case further.

"Janice, you're right!" I cried, backing her up, "—what anybody says about me makes not the slightest difference in the world to me," I avowed.

"—as long as they say SOMETHING!" Billy sallied, on the outskirts, carrying in the coffee.

. . . . . .

My legs grew weary fetching pails of beer from Luke O'Conner's. . .

Dawn, and a few lingered on.

Jarl Loring, disgruntled at having been beaten in a latter debate, rose and lumbered forth.

On all the landings, going down, we could hear him smashing milk bottles with his cane; through inebriate pique over his verbal defeat.

"Jarl,"—Janice—running out to the head of the stairs and shouting down—"you let up on those milk bottles! . . do you want to get me kicked out of my flat?"

. . . . . .

I was the sole remaining guest.

Janice and I sat curled up side by side on the couch, still talking.

Billy was opening the windows wider, to let out the dense cigarette smoke.

"Anybody looking up from the sidewalk would call the fire department!" she joked . . then—bossing——

"Come on, Janice—it's time to turn in for a few hours' sleep."

"Don't bother us, Billy!"

"Janice, won't you ever be old enough to stop making a fool of yourself? You've your first class at half past nine."

"I won't go to bed at all . . just set the coffee percolator going!"

"I *won't* . . when you ought to go to bed."

Janice meekly let her feet down to the floor—rising.

"Yes, Johnny, you better go now . . I'll have to obey Billy. She'll give me no peace till I do—and, anyhow, she's quite right!"

. . . . . .

Women had not yet won the right to vote, but were on the eve of winning that right. . .

There was a suffrage parade down Fifth Avenue, and I walked in it, well to the front: Janice—bobbed hair, meal-sack gown, brown socks, sandals,—on one side of me; a very attractive girl from one of her English Classes,—on the other. . .

I bore one of the banners. The wind blowing rendered it an arm-wearying, unwieldy object. . .

On and on the masses of women poured, their dresses blowing about them, eyes steadfastly to the front, thrilling to the crusade, each seeing the bright vision of political equality with the men. . . while more hoodlums than the police should have permitted to be there, were lined up on the curbs, from which they voiced audible comments, and called out from time to time with remarks that made the cheeks of the women redden who overheard. . .

Once or twice I was on the point of stepping out of the ranks and bringing down my banner-pole on the head of some fellow or other who shouted something particularly offensive . . but Janice restrained me . . it would only give adverse criticism an opportunity —would only injure the Cause. . .

My threatened action was not entirely disinterested: Janice's pupil, marching by my side,—pale from excitement, and prettier because of that paleness that became her—flashed sidelong smiles of approbation. . .

After that,—time and again, I started belligerent gestures with the pole, not meaning to carry any of them into effect—just to meet with Janice's thankful restraint,—just to seem big and daring to the girl marching by my side!

. . . . . .

There was the men's auxiliary section, bobbing along by themselves, looking rather drab in comparison to the gey-colored women marching under their banners . . they came in for much booing and kidding. . .

Richard LeGallienne was well to the front among them . . striding along, not heeding comments hurled by the mob . . wielding a nonchalant, big, black cigar as he trod forward in his dignified, offhanded manner.

. . . . . .

Janice was one of the chief founders and the first moving spirit of two radical organizations—"The Radical Club," then located on East Eighteenth Street—afterward to be removed to Macdougal Street in the Village—and of a smaller organization that included a few of the inner crowd—"The Diminutive Club," the rooms of which were located over the then notorious Arch Café, where it was said the Car Barn Bandits held their rendezvous.

The Diminutive Club consisted of but two rooms, not large ones at that.

One of these rooms was equipped with a large gas range and utensils for cooking and eating. . .

To the rooms of The Diminutive Club, Janice and the few others repaired for reinvigorating coffee after more general parties . . for breakfast bacon after dances that had spun themselves out into greying dawn . . for the inevitable lively debate and discussion, too!

. . . . . .

Janice Godman was the one among my new friends and acquaintances who knew my poetry. So far I had not had a single book of it published, and none of the others took the trouble to read my verses as they appeared here and there in the magazines. . .

"The bunch ought to know your poetry," said Janice, championing me.

She suggested that I give a reading of my poems, some Saturday afternoon, at The Radical Club—in order to bring people to the realization that I was something more than a mere bizarre, publicity-created personality. . .

I had not yet gotten down to my old practice of whipping out manuscripts of recent verse, stopping friends and acquaintances wherever I met them and reading what I'd written, aloud to them.

Except to Janice. . .

I considered it obligatory to bring The Radical Club to the understanding of me that Janice Godman suggested. . .

. . . . . .

I read:

Love songs, tramp ballads, sea-chanteys. . .

The applause was good, but I could easily perceive—was given mostly for the enthusiasm I myself showed for my work—for my performance, in short, and not for the work itself. . .

Free verse was in vogue, and I was chagrined when "the debate was thrown open,"—at the criticisms that followed. . .

"Old-fashioned," "hackneyed," "it had all been done before, and better, by much greater poets."

In rebuttal I attacked Free Verse, in frenzied retaliation, the frenzy of which diminished by two-thirds the force of my argument.

There followed a great flying of metaphorical fur and feathers . . at last the honors of the debate rested with me: I boomed everybody else down. . .

People came up to shake my hand . . mostly unattractive, older women. . .

In the meantime I had all I could do to restrain myself from roughly thrusting them aside and diving through their midst, to a tiny girl, a lovely mature woman in miniature, who sat far in the back, vaguely smiling toward me, and smoking one cigarette off the butt of the other.

But common politeness held me, or was it the cordon of women I hated speaking to?—I could not break through in time to meet the strange girl.

Passing through the door, she shot back a final, smiling look from beneath her floppy picture hat that made her seem tinier. . .

. . . . . .

I haunted The Radical Club, as I had formerly haunted The Fernando Center and the office of "Free Earth."

I woke in the mornings, all a-tremble, desiring that unknown girl.

Then, one afternoon, she put in an appearance. I went directly up to her. I introduced myself.

While we conversed in the window-seat I fingered the sole change in my pocket, conjecturing whether I'd have enough to invite her to tea at some inexpensive place.

I considered Trotter's.

If I stayed on, it would soon be time for early supper. . .

But Trotter, while he didn't object to trusting me, alone—if I brought in somebody else with me, he might consider it an imposition.

However, I'd take a chance.

But Beryl Laudiss would not let me take her to supper, charging it.

"We'll go to Paglieri's . . my treat . . you're a poor poet."

. . . . . .

The things we are tempted to leave out!—we who attempt to tell the truth about ourselves! . .

Far back, I wrote about my interest in the present emotional and spiritual circumstances of former friends . . and I mentioned one who had been both more and less than a friend,—casually—"she

was at home with her people, where she could have luxury attendant at her elbow"—it was something like that I said. . .

But I saw her yet again:

After a dreadful night of—shall I call it—"mate-fright"—during which I lay fearing that I was henceforth to go womanless through my life—that is, womanless to the extent of having no emotional permanence in my relationship with women——

I would call up Hildreth, would dare ask her to have tea with me at The Brevoort! . .

Maybe she would come!

But there the matter would not rest—I would ask her to marry me, since I was assured that Penton had at last been granted his divorce in Holland. . .

Why not? It would be quite romantic, too! . .

Free Love, I still believed in it, but the fight against stupidity was too savage and hard . . my game, I was at last convinced, must mainly be the literary game. . .

— . . First the maid came to the 'phone. I would not give my name. Then *she* came, full of curiosity that I could detect by her voice——

"Yes, who is it?"

The voice was sweet as ever.

When she heard who I was she did not hang up on me. . .

As if it had been a friendship interrupted for a few days, she accepted my calling her up.

She would have tea with me, of course.

. . . . . .

We met again, Hildreth and I, in the southwest downstairs room of the Brevoort. Instead of pressing the point I had distressfully hit upon, in my heart's agony, two nights before,—I was talking about poetry—not my poetry, either—in the way I used to talk. . .

But Hildreth wasn't listening very hard. A distressed look in her eyes halted my flow of words.

"Go on, please, 'boy-boy,' " trivially, not passionately, calling me by the pet name she had used for me—"don't stop talking—I was just removing your spoon from your tea cup . . it's bad manners to leave it standing there. . .

"But, anyhow, you don't smack your lips, eating your muffins, as

'Mubby' (her pet name for Baxter) used to do, when he ate those veal steaks. . ."

I asked Hildreth if she had gone on with the novel she had started, when we were defying the world together, down at West Grove, in our cottage on the Jersey coast.

No,—she hadn't. Her family, all her friends, had joined in dissuading her.

"What a pity. It was promising, what you had finished of it."

Uncommonly irritated for subtler, unexpressed reasons, I assured her that if she had been possessed of the true creative urge, she could not have been thus easily dissuaded.

She bade me good-by.

As we parted and she stepped into the taxi, I noticed that her hair was not as black and abundant as my memory had recorded . . I noticed that her nose was a trifle too strongly modeled for her face . . that there were the merest shadows of coming wrinkles about her eyes.

No, what a hypocrite I was!—it was because I at last realized that she could never be called back into my life—that, defensively, I did not wish really to call her back—it was because of this that I was urged to impute defects to her.

The sweet, melancholy droop about the left corner of her mouth—the droop that I had loved to kiss away—was all there was left that I had formerly known! . .

. . . . . .

And, while I am at it . . for I must not leave out the things that hurt (they, more than any, belong to my spiritual evolution, and must be acknowledged) I should confess that, while I behaved so desperately about Opal, I was seeing another woman.

Not living with her, just visiting her.

There was a great consolation in sitting in her presence, merely talking with her, that alleviated my suffering for the woman that I loved, who eventually proved unattainable. . .

I must go back to the time Darrie was in town . . to the time I was visiting her, in her uptown apartment:

Many people, unhappily married, wrote Baxter for advice. In a less degree, they applied to Hildreth and to me for guidance.

Most of these cases simmered down to people who wished to show

themselves off, or had some other objective beyond that of seeking advice.

Baxter, especially, took these letters to heart.

But he proved as wary of traps as he was anxious to help. . .

One unusually persistent woman Baxter consented to see, appointing for a meeting place, a bench on Riverside Drive near Grant's Tomb . . Darrie as Chaperon. . .

"You've often spoken of your ultimate dream's being some beautiful, red-headed woman," Darrie commented, in recounting the adventure, while laughing over Baxter's wary simplicity, "—well, you should have seen this woman . . her hair was as red as the central core of fire in a grate!"

I sat, taken with the idea.

When a mere boy, it had been a habit of mine to hurry ahead of any red-headed woman I saw on the street, looking back into her face, when I got ahead, to see if she was beautiful, approximating the ideal I sought.

"—Darrie, I must meet that woman . . you must arrange it."

Mrs. Isabel Vintoun—Darrie never arranged a meeting for me with her——

"I'm not going to be the one to put you in the way of more trouble."

But I begged her address from Darrie, the day she was packing her trunks, preparing for her rush abroad following Baxter's departure. . .

. . . . . .

A brief note from me, explaining who I was—and Mrs. Vintoun's curiosity led her to invite me over to Brooklyn for tea. . .

I had no car fare. I walked. I footed it across Brooklyn Bridge.

Tugs waded tinily below.

Mrs. Vintoun lived in an apartment house pretentiously ornate. A soft long carpet trailed up the entrance hall, and half-mirrors edged its walls.

"Whom do you wish to see?" asked the negro at the telephone, drolly grammatical, and eying me in the same fashion the negro servants had eyed me, in Gramercy Square, when I first came to the city, seeking a room in that locality . . he rolled his smoky-yellow

eyes toward me without changing the position of his head and without removing the metallic receiver clasped close to his ears.

"Mrs. Isabel Vintoun, if you please!"

He eyed me, frankly doubting.

"She expects me. . ."

The bell of Mrs. Vintoun's apartment tinkled remotely far, in response to my pressure . . after a long wait, there answered shuffling footsteps like a Chinaman in sandals.

The door widened slowly and surreptitiously, and I looked into the Unhappily Married Woman's face—whom Darrie had described as uniquely beautiful. At first glance I thought so, too.

She went ahead of me, conducting me into a room already too dark.

Yet she reached up to unloop another heavy curtain.

"It's dreamier, more poetic, so!"

My eyes fixed themselves on her hand. It was not a young hand. Veins stook out on the back. The skin looked oldish.

The obscurity rendered it hard for me to detect the tired tiny wrinkles about the truly marvellous sea-green eyes.

The firm flesh of her cheeks seemed unnaturally young, in contrast.

She had been very beautiful. Now she possessed but the wreckage of beauty.

She suffered in comparison with the fresh girlishness of Opal . . how weak and vain I was . . what the devil was I over here for?

. . . . . .

My hostess stepped out of the room, came back with coffee. She stepped out again, returning, holding a square-shaped bottle the sides of which were quaintly indented . . she poured a liquid from it into her cup of coffee. . .

"—have a shot in yours?"

"It depends on what it is!" I returned suspiciously.

"The finest Barbadoes rum . . try a bit and see how it adds flavor. . ."

. . . . . .

The great bridge, loud with its orchestras of traffic, was again under my feet. . .

"What extraordinary eyes they were!"

Immediately I wondered if they were naturally so . . if it wasn't something else beside coffee and Barbadoes rum——!

Even at that, if it had not been that I loved Opal—that is,—if the other woman had desired me——!

. . . . . .

From that time on, I visited Mrs. Vintoun intermittently.

Whenever she came across a poem of mine in a magazine that she fancied, a florid letter would come to me.

Seeing a poem of mine in a magazine increased me in her estimation.

Again I would be invited to come over and have some coffee with rum.

And I would either go, or write in reply, a posing, literary letter.

Though there was something about her that repelled me, besides those flashes of oldness prematurely induced, in some strange manner, flashes that peeped out and then withdrew, from different parts of her face—my vanity would not let me drop her entirely.

It overcame my strong instinct to beware.

. . . . . .

Whereas the thought of Jerry's homeliness had embarrassed me, it was Beryl's tininess that gave me equal embarrassment.

Walking along beside her, I felt ridiculous.

Once a fellow called out, a member of a corner gang:

"Hey, why don't you pick her up an' put her in your pocket?"

But when Beryl sat down opposite me in a restaurant there seemed less disparity in our stature.

"You're not quite at your ease when you're with me, because I'm so little . . isn't that so?"

"You're much too good-looking for me to mind that!" I replied, evasively.

"Every day I wish I wasn't so small; everybody speaks to me as if I were a child, not a grown young woman. . .

"Only the other day, while I was stepping into an elevator to sell some of my drawings to a magazine, the elevator operator said 'Hello little cuty'!"

I asked her what she had said in return.

"Do you really wish to hear? I was most profane." She asserted, looking archly up at me.

"Go ahead!"

She rapped out a volley of oaths that would have done credit to one truck driver, cursing another, in a jam.

The incongruity of her curses filled me with desire for her.

I did not desire Beryl for a permanent mate any more than I had desired Jerry. A sense of intrigue was ripening in me.

I was eager for her tiny, virginal flower-freshness. . .

. . . . . .

Beryl was a painter chiefly of flowers.

She knew the names and life-habits of every indigenous flower that grew in North America. . .

She had been reading my verse lately, looking it up in Poole's Periodical Index in the Library. . .

"You've written a few quite readable verses, but your knowledge of American flowers is lamentable—you, who boast of becoming the poet of Modern America and its life."

It was inexcusable, she said, for an American poet to be using metaphors and similes of the European flowers—like the Poppy, though natural for Milton and Keats. . .

I was about to go back to my hut in the Jersey woods at Perfection City.

I saw that it would assure me of a certain hold on Beryl, if I induced her to take on herself my education in American Flora——

"I'll send you specimens of flowers I don't recognize, and you can write me back all about them—how would you like that?"

. . . . . .

Seldon's hut that I had occupied last had burned down. But he had another hut built of thinner boards, not much further back, on the edge of a winding wood road. . .

. . . . . .

The Spring had deceived me and a few forlorn birds, into believing that it had come for good—when it sifted into icy blasts bringing thin, stinging drifts of snow!

The wind streaming in through the single clapboards of my new hut, made my lean, long legs ache like immersion in icewater.

Fortunately for me, Seldon's Health Home was, at the time of the year, meagerly patronized, and he could spare me a few blankets. . .

I sat writing, the blankets three fold about my legs, braced up straight across a chair, to avoid the air currents below. . .

Alone and enduring bad weather, I wrote better and hoped higher.

A senseless series of repeated physical hardships?

Not at all, avowed the tenacious poet in me. . .

To shilly-shally, to philander, to trifle time and not to study enough—these in the end proved fructifying processes, I instinctively knew, when my doubts of myself were greatest . . ! I learned life thus!

A regular job, and Philistine comfort—or a part-time job. . .

Take a regular job and cease being a poet—take a part-time job, and, worse—become a part-time poet!

. . . . . .

Once more I possessed the immemorial stove that kept only itself warm. . .

My third sojourn in the ruined hope that had been called "Perfection City" brought the neighborhood, curious over my heralded return, by my door. For there had been a bit in the local Cottswold paper about "The Vagabond Poet's being again among them."

Even in the midst of the adverse weather, parties of villagers and dwellers in nearby towns tracked through the thin snow, past my hut, like inquisitive animals on a scent. . .

The bolder among them peeked in at my window, shading their eyes with their hands for a better look. . .

All of them, as they straggled by my door and window, talked and laughed from excitement.

Resenting their intrusion, at the same time I was exhilarated by their notice, and I drew a sense of pleasing importance from it. . .

And, one day, when a tall, pretty girl loitered by, fine and straight like a full-grown cornstalk—and by her side a smaller, dark girl,—companion and unconscious foil to the taller one's pert, half-way boldness—my curiosity was excited. . .

A second time she loitered past, accompanied by her protective friend. . .

The third time, I picked her out when she and her friend seemed like black, upright, nondescript objects, moving over a Russian background of white. . .

To make an impression, I waited the moment when she would be near, and then shot out of my shack, shirt-sleeved and bare-headed.

Furiously I began chopping away at a log. . .

When she drew close I detected that she was not so thorough a woman as I had supposed, from the first and second glimpses of her full, womanly body.

For she wore long girlish hair of which she seemed inordinately proud.

Her hair came down her back to the bend of her knee, in long, corn-colored, very thick braids . . the braids were much like the color of straw or of that pale taffy which you see being stretched back and forth, by a machine, in a store window. . .

Her eyebrows were faint smudges of gold that melted, if you didn't look close, indistinguishably, into her pale, regular face. . .

For a space the old, silly paralysis gripped me.

I conquered my timidity by speaking indirectly to her,—looking at the lesser plain companion, when I gave my greeting:

"Hello!"

I rested my axe—including, by a turn of face and a forced smile, the taller one—to focus my whole gaze upon her.

The little girl was silent——

The other spoke boldly:

"Hello, Mr. Gregory, aren't you cold, chopping wood,—wearing no coat?"

They were silly, sweet girls, finding a romantic figure in me.

. . . . . .

A letter, from Arnold Rankin.

True Spring having come, he was looking for a place to settle for the summer,—somewhere in the country,—the ideal place, where he could bring to a conclusion his long-pending philosophic religion.

The name "Perfection City" sounded propitious to him. . .

Could he, he asked, come and put up with me, till he found a house to his liking?

I replied that he might, but that I couldn't afford to board him.

His response was that he would provide food for both of us.

I invited him to come.

Seldon let me have another cot—for my guest.

Rankin proved neater than a woman. He immediately swept the

floor, though I had previously swept it myself. He put the shack in complete order.

Tinkering with the stove, he straightway found out what had been the matter with it—"you didn't regulate the damper"—which is what had been the matter with a long line of stoves of mine!

A cat takes no more deliberate, salacious pleasure in its toilet than Rankin took in caring for his person . . he took fully half an hour before the cracked mirror combing his bushy beard out, silky and glistening, and he employed at least fifteen minutes arranging and brushing his thick, iron-grey hair.

But it was in no feminine manner that he thus tended to his toilet. It was done with a comfortable, slow dignity,—with a grave, masculine satisfaction.

I schooled myself to endure Rankin's morning offices, because, before settling down to them, he brewed surprising coffee in the battered tin pot, and because, from his own purse he brought in steak and potatoes and lamb chops and whole wheat bread, and all sorts of food.

The weather growing quickly warmer, I could evade his after-breakfast grunts and sighs of satisfaction that he emitted while he attended to his long toilet, by taking to the pines to read and write——

We took turns at washing the dishes and doing the housework—at first.

. . . . . .

But, eating together, I couldn't evade the smacking noise he made chewing his steaks, open-mouthed like an animal.

I suppressed my feelings for several weeks, then, one evening at supper——

"Christ, Rankin!" I burst out at last, "why do you have to make such a noise, chewing?——"

A surprised, upward glance from his portion of steak that he was leaning over, devouring it half raw. . .

"—One would think that a man of your upbringing and culture——"

"—Why, Johnny, it's the most natural way to eat—making a noise while you chew!"

"It might be the most natural, but I'm damned if——"

"—The way people eat," he interrupted, in the solemn fashion of the doctrinaire, "is merely a matter of custom. . .

"There are the Chinese, for instance—who possess the oldest civilization in the world. . .

"At a banquet in China, the guest who chews loudest and makes the most noise smacking his lips, is the one that shows the host he enjoys the food most—and such behavior is taken for complimentary, and the polite thing to do."

"But," I tried again, my temper rising. But he chopped in quickly and continued solemnly as if demonstrating a theorem:

"It's more stupid, chewing the way you do . . mincing your food noiselessly, keeping your mouth shut . . by which method of chewing neither your teeth nor your jaw-muscles find the full exercise needed to keep them in good condition. . .

"Look!"

And he flung his mouth wide open, revealing a set of gleaming, strong teeth, except for the two gold-filled ones,—to bear out his contention.

Already my nerves had been wound to a pitch of unbearable irritation. . .

For I was furious at him also because of his continual complaining about the unfair deals his various sweethearts had handed out to him——

To listen to him—you would think that women had mistreated him worse than any man in the world had been treated—and that he, of course, had no faults at all.

My rage seethed over. Eyes blazing, I snatched up the axe.

"—So you see," he had just proclaimed conclusively, "philosophically, and from every logical viewpoint, except the meager one of artificial etiquette—I'm in the right!"

"By God," I cried, "whether you're in the right or not, if you don't stop chewing your steak out loud, I'll smash your head in!"

"Why, Johnny," he gasped, stammering, surprised and horrified, as I lowered the axe, "would you?—over such a little thing?"

"You're Goddam right I would!" setting the axe back into the corner, smiling quietly to myself,—my back turned.

We made a compact that he would, during the remainder of his

stay in my hut, do his further chewing in silence . . which he did, forgetfully slipping, occasionally. . .

I for my part, agreed to remit some fault of mine that annoyed him.

I have forgotten what my fault was.

. . . . . .

After my outburst he placatively took over complete care of the domestic details of our establishment. I discovered he enjoyed the housework.

The place shone from floor to window. Like a new pin.

. . . . . .

Rankin contended that he was a "perfectionist" . . that it ought to be possible, if you kept on seeking—to find the ideal in everything: the trouble with most people was, that they grew discouraged: the perfect physical condition; the perfect mate; the perfect environment;—they were all attainable and practicable—if one persisted in the quest. . .

On the subject of foods he held the same opinion.

He would experiment with diets till he had hit upon the one perfectly suited to him; thus he would bring his mind and body to their highest powers.

He further contended that on a diet of the right foods he would reach a state where there would remain nothing unpleasant in any of the "grosser" bodily functions . . nay, rather—under regimen of a right diet, men would grow to be as the houris in a Mohammedan paradise—smelling all of civet and musk.

Were not the sweetest odors of flowers excretory?

I leaped up with an hilarious whoop, plunging into the lake.

When I got back, sitting and drying off in the sun——

"—Say, Arnold, if you believe in absolute perfectionism, why don't you begin right here and now?"

"Before I can begin any reshaping of my life, I'll have first to hit upon the perfect environment."

"Do you really expect to find THAT?"

"Why not?"

. . . . . .

It was by no means perfect where we were; perhaps he would find that earthly paradise in California—if not there, then on some island

in the South Seas. In the meantime—New York would be better.

For selfish reasons I was sorry for his departure.

I had to fall back on a more meager diet than his remittances had afforded while he was there.

. . . . . .

All the time Rankin had been with me in my shack, the tall girl who had the corn-colored, massive-braided hair had failed to stroll by—she and her companion.

Though wondering where she had gone to (perhaps seeing me once or twice had satisfied her curiosity) I was somewhat glad she had not come by while my friend was there.

I feared the facility he had, of adding women to his list.

I fully realize now that it was partly jealousy of the older man's successful love-affairs, as well as disgust at his table manners, that led to my furious outbreak against him that I have recounted. . .

Between the two of us, Rankin was less violent in outward, social behavior; he was, in fact, a suave, persuasive gentleman, whereas I was subject to boisterous, unforeseen outbursts—the more timid I felt inside, the more boisterous!

. . . . . .

The life of the poet ought, primarily, to be the life of the imagination.

With a small income and plenty of books, I (I was sure) could put all active life by, and retreat entirely into the life of the imagination.

The anchorite in the Thebaid had lived in a bare cell, while his vision flowered through and through with the brightness and glory of heaven and the angelic hosts.

Why might I not dwell all my days in a hut in the country, attic in the City—ecstatic in the midst of my poetry, like the monk of the Thebaid?

Why must, to the creator, to the poet—why must very humanness be Adam's curse. . . ?

The human need, especially the need for women—it would begin upon me, out there in my hut, or in my room in the City, vague at first, to grow more and more insistent,—spreading slowly, pervasively, through every fiber of me.

At this stage of my lonely dreaming, came a small, perfumed letter from Beryl.

The tall, straying girl of the corn-colored hair, had caused me to be delinquent in sending flowers for identification.

The perfume in Beryl's letter came from a flower enclosed.

"You seem to have forgotten me—but look for the enclosed flower in your vicinity."

. . . . . .

One day Billy Seldon showed up while I was taking my morning sun-bath.

Hearing feet swishing through the grass, I hurriedly flung an end of a blanket over my body.

"Don't jump! it's only me!

"I had to drop over to see how you were getting along . . hope I didn't break in on a poem."

"That's all right! You didn't! . . glad to see you, Billy."

"—wife said I ought to drop around . . she was worried."

"No one need ever worry about me . . I go my own way——"

"She says you might have been dead here for days, and no one know."

Seldon handed me a note.

It was a quaintly worded and illustrated invitation from two caricaturists, unknown to me personally—who had recently come to Cottswold.

They wished to know me, had asked Billy, the next time he came my way, if he'd deliver a note from them.

The note specified if I liked plain grub and plenty of it, they'd be pleased to have me come up for supper, Saturday night.

Saturday nights they had corn beef and cabbage.

They had heard of my being there, through Seldon, and through the gossip of others.

"John Gregory! Do you mean to tell us he lives near here? He must be a good scout . . we'll have to look him up."

"They're pretty good scouts themselves: you'll have plenty of fun with them."

. . . . . .

Of Michael Keefe, Australian cartoonist and caricaturist, I had never heard,—but, since my boyhood, I had known of Jimmy Firth, whose Sunday Syndicate cartoon series of "After School" were a comic staple.

The illustrations scrawled over the letter—a drawing by Firth, of "Little Rastus" the reverse-hero of "After School"—small body, and great, frizzly, balloon-like head—always the butt for the practical jokes of the gang of white kids that he played with. . .

Keefe drew a hopping kangaroo.

. . . . . .

I am an appreciator of rough foods—fried beefsteak, corn beef and cabbage, pigs' feet and sauerkraut. . .

I smelt the corn beef and cabbage on the air, coming in through the front gate of the house where the cartoonists lived . . through the front gate that hung solely by its top hinge, and up the weather-bleached porch where lurched one wrecked lop-sided rocking chair.

The house gave the appearance of a derelict washed up on the beach.

"Come in or stay out!" was the rough, jovial response to my knock.

I turned the knob of the front door and stepped into a large, dilapidated room from the walls of which the paper was peeling in neglected strips.

Though it was a hot summer evening, the windows were closed. The only ventilation came through a broken pane.

Mixed with the odor of cooking corn beef and cabbage I detected the strong undercurrent of another odor—the odor of whiskey.

But Firth and Keefe, though they had been—were not at present—drinking. They were perched side by side on high stools before a large sloping board, each rapidly working at a large pen-and-ink sketch. Each wore a green eyeshade. They were in their vests.

Keefe looked neat, but Firth's shirt was soiled with smears of ink, and the frayed edges of his dangling sleeves were grimy.

They had not yet greeted me.

After a while, Firth, my host, swung down from his high stool, turning toward me.

"Why, it's Gregory—here he is!" as if announcing the arrival of a personage.

I observed mentally how like his creation "Little Rastus" Jimmy Firth was . . his over-large head seemed to sway balloon-like in space, while beneath it moved his wavering, short, compact, doll-like body. His hands and feet were small and feminine. His eyes

were "pop-eyed," round and blue . . at present raddled a fierce red from too much drink.

His voice—shut your eyes, and you would think you heard a giant talking!

It was strange, what a strong handclasp that small feminine hand was capable of . . it was stranger, what a booming, masculine voice came forth from his mouth—an incongruous bass that suggested ventriloquism. . .

A woman called from within that supper was ready.

"We must give Gregory an appetizer!"

Firth took a run, like a schoolboy up to a prank,—toward a cupboard set in a corner.

"No, you don't. I'm on to you! You're maneuvering for another swig yourself!"

And the giant, black-haired Australian was upon him, at a jump and a stride.

Firth already had the flask in his hand. . .

"When I need a keeper——" panting, exclaimed Firth,—wrestling to keep possession of the bottle,—almost a match, despite his deceptive smallness, for his strapping companion. . .

Keefe won possession of the bottle, reached it, high overhead, to me.

"Gregory can have a swig, but not *you.* Take a good one, Gregory!"

I did. I saw it would be necessary to bolster myself up.

I never liked real dirt much. And the dirty shirt Firth wore, and the flies voyaging in a line through the broken pane, as if also invited to supper—rather went against my stomach.

Sitting around the table——

"We just can't keep these damned flies out!" explained Firth, batting at them.

But the whiskey's warmth had crawled through my body on slow claws of fire——

It set a rosy haze about me, and an edge to a natural appetite.

And I did not mind the flies, the dirt, nor the huge, spewling baby, set in its high chair,—gurgling and bubbling over its expanse of soiled bib, swinging its dripping spoon about.

Mrs. Firth was now seated and now up again, waiting tirelessly on us, slumping about in huge carpet slippers much too wide for shapely, naked feet. She wore a soiled, black dress with lots of buttons on it, except where they had been lost off.

She had previously brought the baby in, astraddle her out-thrust right hip, in old-country, peasant fashion.

I wondered how it had ever been possible for so small a woman to have borne from her body, such a Gargantuan baby. . .

The corn beef and cabbage was wondrously cooked. It melted creamily in my mouth.

. . . . . .

After we'd had a few more drinks—and a few more than a few more—we fell into amiable discussion, hours long and interminably wordy. . .

Then it was:

"Good-by, Katie," "Good-by, Jimmy," "Good-by, Jack!"

"Good-by, Johnny—now that you know the way, you can't come to see us any too often!"

I loped home, imagining I was a great runner—singing softly under a fine moon.

. . . . . .

But the next time I visited the derelict frame house in which Firth and his wife, baby, and friend dwelt—Keefe warned me:

"Look out, Johnny! You mustn't call Mrs. Firth 'Katie'—Jimmy's jealous as hell! . . he makes even me speak to her as 'Mrs. Firth'."

"He's crazy with the heat," I responded, irritated.

"We all have our ways!" returned Jack.

. . . . . .

On Saturdays and Sundays the south shore of little lake Emily was transformed into a thronged bathing beach.

It was then that the fathers of the families that lived in summer camps and cottages among the pines, drove down in their battered Fords for week-ends. And the local townsmen came, too, both to bathe and to look on.

It usually irked me when people came; but sometimes the shouting and merrymaking of my fellow-beings hiving together drew me out

to join them. At such times being in the midst of them filled my need for companionship.

. . . . . .

One Sunday afternoon, picking my way down to the beach from my hut, I heard a voice that I knew.

It was the tall girl of the massive-braided, corn-colored hair.

Gundra Thorenson,—her name.

In her immediate company was, not the smaller dark girl, but her fair-haired, younger sister. . .

Introduced to the latter by Gundra, I joined them in the water.

Gundra could paddle "dog-fashion"; her sister could swim well enough.

I volunteered to teach Gundra to swim better.

She was a great-bodied, but symmetrically shaped girl, beautiful and vigorous like the Viking stock she came from.

"My mother's bathing suit . . she's even bigger than me!" Gundra looked up coquettishly,—naïvely explaining.

"Try the breast-stroke; look! This is it!"

I illustrated.

"Try to do it!"

By degrees I drew her apart from the crowd, and from her sister.

"Gundra, where have you been all this time?"

"O,—away!" embarrassed.

"Visiting some one?—some relative?"

"Yes, an aunt!"

"Why don't you tell me the truth?"

She paused, pondering——

"I will then . . you won't think me silly?"

"Of course not."

"Some people saw me going by your hut. I was told to look out for you."

Immensely flattered——

"So they knocked me to you, did they?"

"Yes, every one thought you were a bad man."

"Thought?—you mean they think better of me now——"

"Yes,—they think better of you now."

If they "thought better of me," it was because they discovered I

"didn't act stuck-up" . . passed the time of day with whomever I met. . .

Affability goes a long way, in country and small-town districts.

. . . . . .

I needed women for my body, I needed women for my soul, I needed women for my poetic inspiration.

Just the seeing of this foolish, great, handsome girl again, the mere philandering with her, set me writing verse afresh, day after teeming day.

Transmuting my excitement over Gundra into writing, I plunged into the composition of "The Western Wife," another narrative poem . . the story of the wife of a Kansas farmer, and of the tragedy that came into their lives, through the former's affair with a travelling salesman. . .

"The Western Wife" ran to about five hundred lines.

While composing it, to keep myself at top pitch I drank pot after pot of pitch-black tea of frightful strength. . .

It was pedestrian verse, at best, I perceive now-a-days, but at the time William Marion Reedy spoke well of it, characterizing it as "catch-as-catch-can rhyme," but "vital and spirited."

The frightful brewings of boiled tea threw me into a fever and sickness, but the work was finished.

Like a sick animal, I soaked myself listlessly in the lake.

"What's the matter with you, Johnny?" Gundra asked, "you look sick."

"Ive just finished writing the greatest poem ever written by an American."

. . . . . .

Thus Gundra showed up every so often, to swim with me, and our harmless flirtation progressed. I drew my chief pleasure from boasting to her about what a great poet I was.

Often her sister, Edith, accompanied her.

Edith seldom swam, but instead sat watching from the bank, calling out and talking.

They would never come into my hut, not from fear of me, but for fear of scandal.

Once they brought a camera along, and proudly took turns stand-

ing by my side, each snapping a picture of the other with me . . to keep for a memento.

In the copies they presented me, I was amused at myself,—in my more self-critical moments,—to find that I had puffed out my cheeks slightly, in order to appear fuller of face.

. . . . . .

Shortly after my present arrival at Perfection City there came there to live a noteworthy friend of mine who had been one of the chums of my adolescence at Haberford. Then he was a strong youngster of eighteen, and a fine boxer who brought me to the floor, no matter how I fought back, with a few rapid blows.

I could scarcely recognize that companion of my youth in the pallid, skinny fellow, no longer ruddily bursting with vitality, that appeared at the door of my shack, one morning,—unshaven and meager-faced:

"Don't you know old friends any more?"

"You couldn't be Willy Hart?"

He averred that he was. . .

An expert telegrapher, and already making what was, to us, good money, Willy Hart had proven my true friend, in former days.

He had given me fifty dollars from his savings, that I might go back to Mt. Hebron School for another term,—believing devoutly in my future as a great American poet. . .

Somehow I have left Willy out of "Tramping On Life," though if any one belonged in it, he, the most faithful of my friends, certainly did. . .

"Willy, what are you doing down here?"

"We've decided to live in the Open for the rest of our lives, according to the strictest principles of Physical Perfectionism—Marianne and I—except when we have to go back to our jobs for a while in order to accumulate more money——"

"Marianne? who's she?"

"My wife. She and I just arrived the last week. We've been living back in the bushes in a lean-to, with our baby girl . . strange, that you haven't seen us about . . just heard, myself,—you were in the vicinity.

"But, this baby girl of ours . . she's going to become the real thing . . beginning *right*, from the start. . .

"Only the natural, uncooked foods for her! . . systematic exercise . . going entirely naked in the sun. . ."

"But—when she grows up?"

"Long before that, we shall have joined Edward Darling, the Nature Man, in the Sandwich Islands. . where we'll all go naked."

"So you eat no meat, Willy?"

"Not any more . . and I don't pollute my lips with wine, beer, tea, coffee, cigarettes,—either."

"I was just like you are, for awhile," I responded. "But I've since learned the value of what William James advocated in one of his books—not only the necessity of stimulation, but the value of the intercalary jag."

Willy looked at me piercingly. His look created a sense of sin in me—a sense, momentarily, of actual transgression against holy principles.

In my heart I nearly believed in the course he was pursuing—he and his wife, and baby. . . He regarded me as a lost soul——

To avoid standing in silent, awkward embarrassment before him, playfully grappling, I took hold of him.

It was now I who was the stronger. I was able to push him all about.

"Look!—and you used to be twice as strong as I!"

"Being stronger is no proof of better health. I have much more vitality than you—more nervous strength and endurance."

. . . . . .

I visited Hart and his wife, in the bushes.

Marianne was as small as Beryl. Like Beryl beside me, she stood easily under Willy Hart's armpit.

I came upon man, wife, and child taking a sun bath . . and once it was a mudbath in a slough they had dug out and poured water into. They put up a strange appearance, smeared all over, blackish, with the mud.

Willy and Marianne were scrawny, but their baby was large and healthy.

They urged upon me that their own physical condition was no proof in contravention of their theories except that they had bad former habits and conditions to overcome. They pointed to their baby as a warrant for the Natural Life. . .

They were continually munching meager handsful of nuts. . .

Religiously they practiced their exercises. . .

Much of their conversation and concern involved the regularity of their digestion and the movements of their bowels.

Though I believed in the Natural Life, I did not believe in following it to their fanatic extent.

It was so sad to me, that I saw nothing comic in their situation. . .

But Willy avowed he had but half-begun:

He asserted, with a fixed, fanatic glare——

"There's a locality back further in the Jersey hills that we heard of, the other day—where the colonists give up the artificiality of the roof, and dig into the earth, sleeping naked, buried like the roots of trees."

"In that way," supplemented the wife, "their bodies drink up directly the mysterious, powerfully magnetic currents of the earth."

"—then in a few years, we'll be off to Tahiti and Edward Darling's Nature Colony——" further supplemented Willy.

I told them about Arnold Rankin.

"He ought to try Tahiti with us,—but he'll never get anywhere, while he eats the flesh of dead animals . . ugh!"

. . . . . .

This couple truly adored each other. What either said was gospel to the other. Each thought the same thoughts, held the same beliefs. Their spirits grew so close together that when they spoke it was to supplement what the other said, as I have indicated it, in a procession of alternate parentheses.

One would pause, dropping the body of an idea, as it were, midway, and wait fondly for the other to take it up where it was left off—profoundly intimate looks of happiness travelling between them.

. . . . . .

While I sat by Willy's lean-to, discussing the problems of existence, one hot afternoon,—there appeared out of the pines a bushy-bearded man clad in nothing but blue overalls and an undershirt . . he clumbered painfully along, his bare, dirt-brown feet dangling through the trees; he helped himself along, a thick stick in each hand . . the first ape-man trying to walk!

A rise in the ground upset him, and he went down like a shaky bicycle. Laboriously by the aid of his two sticks he pushed himself up to his feet again.

Willy's gesture restrained me from going to his help.

"He's teaching himself how to walk, all over again . . a marvellous case! . .

"When he came here first, they say, they carried him into the woods on a stretcher . . locomotor ataxia it was . . gradually, first by means of a long fast, now through raw food and sun bathing, he's becoming cured——

"He's a living witness that the natural diet——"

"—and sun bathing——" supplemented Marianne.

"—will cure a person——"

"—of any disease——"

They smiled fondly and lovingly into each other's eyes.

. . . . . .

Willy, passing by, saw me and Gundra disporting in the lake. . .

"Who was that fine, strapping girl?"

"A girl from a nearby village."

"She seemed fond of you. I'll bet she'd give birth to a fine baby"—he paused thoughtfully, to continue—"Johnny, here's a solution for you, right at hand. . .

"Why don't you marry this girl and settle your woman-problem without going any farther afield. . .

"Drop the idea of going from one to another——"

"I can't help going from one to another——" I objected.

"—going from one to another," he kept on calmly, ignoring my interposition, "—till you've found your red-headed mate. . .

"This girl's hair's extraordinary enough, it's yellow like ripe corn——

"I assure you, the sex-problem is easily solvable, if you'll only use your common sense . . if you'll learn to practice control. . .

"Any man can live happily in the companionship of any woman, on a basis of 'restrained union'. . .

"Cohabitation, once a year . . for procreation only——"

"Suppose you don't desire children?"

"I was coming to that—the answer is, absolute celibacy.

"Read your Tolstoy . . you don't need to accept his brand of Christianity, but his sex-philosophy's the right and true one."

"Your asceticism makes me tired, Willy,—aren't we to enjoy, ever, in utter frankness, the exquisiteness, the ecstasies of sex?"

"I think that, by drinking wines and by devouring the dead bodies of their fellow creatures, all men have overstimulated themselves,—become diseased and abnormal. . .

"Look at the animals"—Marianne—"they have their long periods of continence, their brief periods of rut——"

"While sick and shameful mankind rut—all the time! . ."—Willy.

"Willy and I have tested and proven all this, by our own lives!"

. . . . . .

It was partly because Willy and Marianne clung to me, dinning sexual asceticism into my ears, that I hungered for a brief city-change from my tree-and-water quiet.

Despite the innocent, coquettish visits of Gundra, I banged to and hasped my hut-door, and was off for New York. . .

Also, a frightful heat fell over the trees and the lake.

"I'll bet it will be cooler in the City than here!"

. . . . . .

Again the panorama and tall pageant that I shall never weary of! . . the great buildings, still heaping there, climbing up over each other,—looking so good to my gladdened eyes! . .

The sun washed stretches of river traffic, the roar and tumult of streets that engulfed me, one of its human atoms! . .

But it shot a pang through my fretful egotism when I considered that all this had steadily been running on just the same, myself not there . . would go rushing ahead the same,—and the affairs of the whole world, too, for that matter,—when I lay stiffened out under my last earth. . .

God in heaven! but I must go headlong into life, before that day came, and while I was still a-tingle with ardor and vitality!

. . . . . .

My former landlady, Mrs. Nough, was glad to see me, and, it being in the slack, late summer season,—the room that I had occupied, in the back, third floor,—the hall bedroom,—was available. . .

. . . . . .

Being in town in mid-summer, when every one else has gone to the country—it is a lonesome proposition.

But, at a venture, I sought out Janice Godman.

Though I believed that of course she must have left for Curlew Island, off the coast of Maine . . where her large, rambling house served as center and nucleus for her group——

I was happy to find that she had not gone as yet.

It was too hot out on Long Island; in the town where stood her ancestral home; too cold, yet, in Maine, she opined.

The City, at present, was the best summer resort.

"But what brings you into town?"

"The same thing that brings you. It has been so hot out in Jersey," I exaggerated, "that the very birds were too uncomfortable to sing, and sat silent under the leaves."

"Johnny, how I envy you your irresponsibility. How I envy you the fine intellectual savagery of your life . . your going about armed with Song for a club!"

. . . . . .

Indeed it proved better in New York than in the country.

In my hut I had poured copious sweat, sitting still.

Here, in through my open window, a cool breeze wafted, tailing out my shirt from the back of the chair on which I had hung it, after having soused and washed it in the washbowl.

Outside,—a lovely thing,—stood, in the back yard, a single ailanthus tree quivering gleamingly, sentiently, through all its body of many leaves, grateful for the cool motions of the air.

. . . . . .

I was tidying myself up; Janice had invited me to accompany her, first to supper at Trotter's, then to have a beer or two at a place she facetiously dubbed "The Working Girls' Home"—why, I could never quite make out.

"The Working Girls' Home" was the large back room of a saloon on Greenwich Avenue run by a genial Irishman named Pat Corrigan.

. . . . . .

I discovered that more people were in town, than I surmised.

"I want to introduce you to Jim Benders, the poet, and to his sweetheart, Jessie Cummins,—and to Vera Williams, a girl who writes labor articles for the magazines. . .

"And Junius Alverson and his wife will also join us . . though," with her usual frankness Janice Godman proceeded, "I'd much rather Mary (Alverson's wife) would not come along . . she's too lackadaisical and pretentious."

. . . . . .

Junius Alverson was the "Italianate," slim, close-bearded chap I had met when I had first been introduced to Janice, by Rankin—at Trotter's. . .

Mary Alverson I had denoted as a "white rose sloppily bursting apart in dishevelment,"—but a gorgeous white rose, at that.

"Insipidly pretty," Janice had characterized her, "affected, and having brains unused to logical processes . . not the proper mate for an intellectual man like Junius. . .

"But there's Vera Williams, of the same type physically, as you'll see, but she doesn't seem to be flowing into nothing like water, as Mary does—on the contrary SHE's compact, all gathered together, —quick and intellectual . . just the mate for Junius, if I can work it," observed Janice.

"I didn't know you believed in interfering in other people's lives in that fashion!"

"Why not, if it's honestly for their betterment?—when a man or woman's success or failure depends on the right or wrong kind of mate?"

. . . . . .

The walls of "The Working Girls' Home" were ornately decorated with mouldings of silvered vines and gilded bunches of grapes.

Here and there hung an old-fashioned painting—the kind that "told a story"; "The Sailor's Homecoming" . . "A Faithful Friend" . . .

The wide, long room was scattered full of tables and chairs, and because of the few of us there, the tables and chairs seemed numberless. . .

Threading through their chaos, a slender girl walked up and down between them, singing and gesturing forth popular songs, in a high, cracked soprano.

She paused at our table, dropping her song to chat familiarly with Janice, childishly fond of the latter.

"I'm bringing that girl and her husband together again," ex-

plained Janice,—the singer gliding away on the resumed rhythm of her song—"in this case reconcilement's justified," she quickly appended, "because she's emotionally dependent on him,—incidentally has a baby."

"I should think the latter case would be the greatest count for a reconciliation!"

"If neither loved the other—on the contrary—the worst! . . bad for all three!"

The girl came again and again to where we sat, like a stray dog to its rescuer.

"Poor kid, she's miserable, singing these jolly songs!"

"Miserable?—and reconciled to her husband?"

"Don't worry—she'd be so miserable she'd commit suicide without him. . ."

There came a gorgeous blare and burst of jangling sound.

"Look, people, there goes 'Corrigan's Illuminated Organ'."

Reminded of a steam calliope in a circus parade, I turned my head to observe the action of the mechanical contrivance mentioned, which went as high as the ceiling.

Through the huge transparency in the front of "Corrigan's Illuminated Organ" a whole Vesuvius showed, gouting flames of all colors, curling mimic smoke intervolved and interwreathed with pouring fire. . .

Accompanied by a deafening climax of drums and whistles, the colors, flames, and mimic smoke raged and raced like all inferno escaping from confinement, in one last burst—up the screen. . !

"I'd like to know why that isn't great art—of its kind!" drawled Janice whimsically.

"I'd like to know who the hell put the nickel in the slot and set it going!" protested Junius Alverson irritably,—who had been saying something very much worth while about Giordano Bruno's Dialogue of Ash Wednesday to me . . that the tremendous noise had wholly drowned out and swept away. . .

But we joined in congratulating Corrigan, proudly hovering near.

It was Corrigan, who, in lieu of any one else, had put a nickel of his own in the slot. . .

In an incautious moment, Janice had informed him that the Organ

was perhaps the crude beginning of a new art that would wed color and music.

. . . . . .

We were to make a fair night of it.

Janice was to conduct us to a dance hall, far uptown, that she had heard of, called "The Menagerie". . "a sight that no one ought to miss."

. . . . . .

"Everybody's doing it!

"Doing what?

"Turkey Trot!!!" sang the seething, surging mob of dancers, the band progressing through the rowdy popular air with shrilling bugles, throbbing, rhythmic drums, sobbing, sliding trombones. . .

Couple by couple, the men and women trotted by, wiggling, waddling, grotesquely jostling . . close as glue together. . .

"Look!" cried Janice, calling our attention to a sociological phenomenon—"The Shimmy!"

A boy and a girl stopped close by us, seemingly rooted to the floor, yet quivering against each other from head to feet like jellies. . .

. . . . . .

"What did you say they called this place?" I asked, forgetting.

"I told you before 'The Menagerie'," Janice reiterated.

"An apt name—if these people don't look like a herd of monkeys come trooping down from treetops! . . it proves Evolution all over again."

But my observation was not one of disapproval. Soon I, along with the rest, was tugging and joggling over the floor in the thick of the sweaty, head-bobbing mob, to the wail of the band.

. . . . . .

However the huge barn of a place had not derived its name fancifully from the appearance of the dancers that thronged its floor, but from the fact that four cages stood, one in each corner—each cage enclosing behind its bars, what appeared to be, at first glance, a species of ferocious animal, to wit: a lion; a tiger; a grizzly bear; a huge ape. . .

I thought it must have been mixing my drinks that was making me see strange sights——

For there the Grizzly lay along, his savage jaw propped up on his right paw, himself looking moodily out into the throng: and the tiger was rearing on his hind legs, his two front paws braced against the bars of his cage; the ape was sitting down scratching his head, a not unnatural gesture; but when the Grizzly began to smoke a pipe, I stopped and rubbed my eyes. . .

Then hitherto an orthodox animal—the lion gave the game away. He threw back his whole head, and out of the neck appeared the drink-purplish face of an unmistakable Irishman.

He pulled a stool over for himself, lifted his tail out of the way, and squatted down—and some one from the bar handed him in a foaming schooner of beer. . .

Curiosity had impelled me close to the cage. . .

"B' Jasus, Jim, but it's hot" he observed to the waiter who had handed him the beer through a slide in the bars. . .

The sweat was rilleting down from every pore in his reddened, rugose neck and face.

. . . . . .

"They're nothin' but old bums th' boss has picked up from the gutter . . they got it pretty easy . . each of 'em picks up a piece of change an' all the beer they c'n drink—an' all they have to do is to lie there."

The derelicts that wore animal hides on that night of excessive heat in those cages—no doubt they added to the popularity of the place: coolness suggested by contrast, perhaps . . perhaps because people rather liked seeing others in a worse fix than they themselves were in. . .

"The Menagerie."

. . . . . .

It was dawn when I turned in.

After a few hours' light sleep I started wide awake as if some one had imperatively shaken me by the shoulder.

I was as refreshed as if I'd gone to bed early and slept the night through with the soundness of a baby's sleep.

"I feel fine, but I must look awful."

But I was pleased with my face in the glass.

There shone an unwonted bloom, softness, and vitality in it.

Singing softly to myself, I sat down to do my stint of writing. Ideas flowed of themselves, and my imagination glowed.

I recalled what Strindberg had written of himself in his "Zones of the Spirit" . . how, having been kept on a doctor's recommended diet of toast and whey, he had for days hung about, miserable and sallow-jowled . . then he had burst loose, and run wild on a jag, unable to endure the tedious regularity any longer. . .

He, too, had caught his face in the mirror, and seen it look—after his debauch—like the countenance of a god. . .

"I'd like to have had good old Willy Hart in here with me . . over to 'The Working Girls' Home' and up at 'The Menagerie'—it would have done him good, too, to fill up on beer and cut loose."

. . . . . .

"—Guess the Jersey heat must have followed you in," observed Janice.

It was waxing momently hotter.

"I like that expression of yours descriptive of the heat—that it was so hot the birds stayed quiet under the leaves and had no energy left to sing. . .

"— Johnny, I think I'll whisk you off with the rest of the folks, to Curlew Island, day after to-morrow. . .

"It's always cool up there, off the coast of Maine. . .

"Can't you come, as my guest?"

"No, I've got to go back to my hut," I refused, half ruefully, —"besides, all my manuscript's out there, and I owe rent——"

—Truth was, I didn't wish to drop my silly, slack "affair" with Gundra. . .

. . . . . .

I was always glad to be back again among my few silent, wise books of poetry; glad to be back where I could stretch unclothed, in the sun again . . to swim, unimpeded, from isolated points along the lake's extended shore.

I liked specially to slip out of my shack in the deep of the night, for a swim. . .

It was glorious to float under the star-sprinkled dark, seeming to be poised alone in endless space and time that lapsed quietly into infinity and eternity like noiseless water lapsing into an immeasurable ocean. . .

As the moon hung above me I would marvel that a whole world like it could drift there with seas of silvery light and shadowy continents,—and not plunge straightway down. . .

To say "Gravitation" made the fact none the less miraculous . . plausible scientific words no more explained the mysteries of life than the unreasonable dogmas of religion resolved them.

Let the mystics "stammer on in starry dialect," since there could be no words set in regular order that could make a grass blade understandable!

. . . . . .

He sat on the further bank, immobile, solitary, watchful. I could sense an obscure reproach, a disapproval, in the stranger's bearing. His collar went all the way round. He must be a clergyman—but what was he doing there?

Gundra and I were swimming in the middle of the lake. She was a good swimmer by now. Under my tutelage she had learned.

"Gundra—who the devil is that fellow sitting there on the bank?—no, not any one in the group near the dam, but the one over there, all alone."

"Our minister up at the Lutheran Church." She blew water out of her mouth expressively and playfully.

Gundra talked little. She liked rather to hear me talk.

But from words she disdainfully and resentfully let drop I pieced the story together: that she had had several arguments to the point of altercation with her pastor—about me . . that, in large concern over her imminent spiritual danger, he had sworn that, every time she came down to swim, he would follow and perch where he was now. . .

"But don't pay any attention to the silly, old-fashioned fool, Johnny!"

. . . . . .

Yet the continued presence of the rangy fellow, always sitting in the same solitary, reproachful pose—his continual watchfulness over the girl—got on the nerves of both of us, though neither would admit it—began to spoil our companionship!

The Reverend Flammer was an extraordinary psychologist; he never once approached me, spoke to me. He just sat and watched.

I learned from Gundra that after the first few blow-ups, he had not spoken to her again. . .

His behavior finally broke up our swimming dates altogether, and Gundra entirely stopped coming to see me.

. . . . . .

I found companionship more often at the house of Jimmy Firth, the cartoonist.

It was no small detail of my frequenting his house that I was often invited to stay for dinner, joining in eating the abundant, coarse, wholesome food I appreciated,—served up in smoking heaps.

. . . . . .

Billy Seldon's Health Home was filling up at last, though late in the season,—his persistent advertising in the smaller and odder magazines bringing results.

There were fifteen patients lying about on his long sun-porch, in reclining chairs, on their voyage toward health. They were all on a milk diet . . a glass of milk, I think, every half hour. . .

They spent their time reading cheap novels, and eye-idling through magazines and newspapers . . particularly they passed whole hours discussing their own and each other's symptoms. . .

Mrs. Seldon did most of the hustling about. Like Mrs. Firth, she was a small woman . . like Marianne, Willy Hart's wife . . like Beryl, the girl with whom I kept up a correspondence about flowers.

Like Mrs. Firth, she, too, had a bediapered, Gargantuan baby crawling gravely about . . and like Marianne. . .

I was wondering if all small women gave birth to enormous babies.

. . . . . .

"You're following the right instinct, my boy," observed Seldon, standing over me where I lay in the sun, reading Shakespeare.

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking up.

"— Just like an animal that's a bit sick, it's good for you to lie in the sun . . you're nerve-sick—frightfully neurasthenic."

"That's nonsense, Billy . . my muscles, they're growing stronger and better proportioned daily."

"It would make no difference if you became a Sandow . . nerves are strange things . . yours are as delicate as a child's . . look at the way your skin takes the sun . . it browns in patches. . .

"Always remember, after your success begins to come, and money —that nakedness in the sun will be your only salvation. . .

"Give you three or four years of the City man's customary life, and it would send you off on 'your last ride.' "

For all their hospitality, Firth and Keefe were vulgar fellows.

Several times they alluded to "The Baxter Affair" as if I were the sly dog indeed.

But beyond such misunderstanding, they possessed much salt wisdom of life.

The curious, unforeseen adventures that men often find themselves involved in, when they are hard drinkers, had taught them much.

For five years the two men had been inseparable.

Once, when drunk, they had gone to sea, nonchalantly walking aboard a boat, and earning their passage to Glasgow drawing pictures and caricatures of the captain, officers, and crew of a freighter.

It was during this period that Firth first met his wife.

Full of good "Scotch," he had staggered into a Glasgow tea room where his fair-haired, little, freckle-nosed Katie was officiating.

The result of that drunken trip had been their marriage. .

"Not such a bad trip at that, was it, Billy?"

Firth, comically, pulled a wry mouth. . .

Often, lately, Keefe let me know, Firth it seemed could not show enough ill-spirit toward his wife, nor put her in enough awkward situations.

Lately, their lives swung from one extreme of bitter quarrelling, to the other of the tenderest demonstrations of affection.

. . . . . .

I couldn't help considering what a kind, white body must be hidden beneath the tawdry, grease-stained black dress that Katie Firth habitually wore. In peasant fashion, she made nothing of exposing her breasts, nursing her baby.

. . . . . .

I had come upon her, walking through the empty house—come upon her sitting there on the back steps in the midst of the dustiness of a day of intolerable dry heat, all the open air about standing stagnant and still as if the sky were but the stuffy walls of an unventilated house.

There was a vacancy in Katie's eyes like the dull glaze of sickness.

When I sat down beside her she didn't notice me at first, then, starting——

"Oh, it's you, Johnny?"

"Yes, Katie,—where are the boys?"

"Off on a bat somewhere . . they've been gone two days since yesterday noon. . . I'm beginning to be worried.

"I've just been giving baby his dinner."

Though the baby was old enough to be weaned, she couldn't muster up the heart to put something bitter on her nipples. . .

Careworn, she had set the great brat down.

It was crawling down the yard through the weeds and neglected, tall grass trying to capture the family cat.

. . . . . .

Sometimes they went off together for a few drinks, Jimmy and Keefe . . this time Jimmy had gone off first, and she had sent Mike Keefe to find him and bring him home.

"Wasn't that like throwing the knife out at the window, after the fork?" I asked.

Her answer was no,—that, compared with her husband, Mike Keefe was sobriety's self. It had been and was Mike's function as intimate family friend to keep in her husband's company when he was on a drunk, hold him in sight, giving him friendly companionship, finally steering him safe home; or to seek him out in his accustomed haunts, when he disappeared, as at present,—by himself.

Mike knew the wayside inns and saloons where Firth would be likely to be discovered, all the way in from Cottswold to the City. . .

Sometimes Jimmy got too long a start, though. . .

"He's gone off to the oddest places—he's tried to join the army—the navy!

"Once he went all the way to New Orleans,—again, to Havana——

"He jumps head first into the craziest situations——"

"What do you do when he's off like that?"

"I exist on, if that's what you mean . . there's one good thing about my husband . . so far," ominously, "he's been an indefatigable worker . . and he manages to stack up enough cartoons ahead to keep his syndicate supplied for weeks . . consequently, the boss in the office lets me have what money I need."

"That, at least's rather decent, Katie!" I patted her hand consolingly.

"But it's no way to live—to go on—for a decent human being. Look what we get out of the big money he makes—the barest existence . . hardly more than any ditch digger or factory hand . . he throws most of what he earns right and left, for drinks, and for treats to absolute strangers."

"You're right, it's no way for a decent human being to live!"

"Besides, there's always the feeling, hanging over me, like—like death!" she was weeping. "Oh, you don't know how terrible it is; to-day, in his right mind, gentle and dear and good . . then, the very next moment there comes that dreadful look into his eyes—like another being getting into him—he isn't the same person any more——

"I can see when the thing's about to take hold."

"—too bad! It's too bad, Katie!"

"And the uncertainty as to what might happen to him—you know anything might. . .

"And the stink of stale whiskey on his breath," she swept her tears away from her eyes with the back of her hand——

A transition of swift disgust:

"Honest to God! sometimes I wonder why I don't kill him!"

Calming down quickly after the outburst, she asked sadly:

"What's the use of loving a man like that?"

"Look here, Katie,—why in God's name don't you pick up and leave him!"

"Maybe I would, and go back to Scotland—if he'd only let me take the baby."

"You could sue for a divorce."

"No, I don't wish that—it's not Christian."

She paused; then she seemed to leap back to herself from far away, with one swift motion:

Her baby had just helped himself to several off-handed mouthfuls of dirt, and was following it up with a chubby fist of grass, collected in the same detached, infantine manner. . .

All the motherhood in her awake and alert, she swished rapidly down the back yard. . .

"Spit it out, Rolly dear! 'pit it in mamma's hand!"

. . . . . .

I had seen Bennett Whellen when in New York, those few hot days, and had once more inveigled out of him ten dollars a week for four weeks—my part of the bargain being to produce in that period part of another narrative poem—"The Western Wife" . . on its receipt, he was to allow me ten dollars more a week up to the sum of eighty dollars in all.

Using a trivial cunning that he would have forgivingly smiled at, I had lied to him about "The Western Wife" in the respect that it was already written.

I was afraid that, if I showed him the whole work immediately, he might not like it, and I might consequently receive nothing for it.

I was great on glowing prospectuses,—on being able to talk up, vividly and appealingly, what I was about to write. . .

With ten a week, steady, for four weeks, and for four more, after that, I would hustle through a short story for the Smart Set. . .

And I would launch into what had long been in my mind—a long story of Tramp Life . . why not emulate London and Gorky, and get away from hanging, ever on the ragged edge, trying to live by poetry?

. . . . . .

Shortly after I had had the long talk with Katie about her husband's eccentricities and dissipation, while I was outside knocking the punching bag against its platform, I was startled by a nearby shout and handclapping of applause.

I turned to behold Jimmy and Mike standing close by.

They looked like the very devil; their clothes dirty and torn, their shoes white with roadside dust, their eyes crimson-streaked and puffy.

Hearing the thud of the punching bag, they had crept up on me like two ghosts,—coming in from the road.

"That's the stuff!" cried Keefe. "You deserve a leather medal—the way you stick to physical culture."

"Say, where have you fellows been, anyhow?"

"Everywhere, but home!"

I sat down alongside them on the grass.

"Katie—Mrs. Firth," I corrected, remembering Keefe's former

reminder of Firth's unreasoning jealousy—"Mrs. Firth's been nearly frantic from worry."

"Katie's a fool to worry, after the number of times we've been off on little jaunts like this, and got back safe."—Firth spoke—"besides I left her plenty of money and she had credit."

Keefe had caught up with Firth in a certain Rahway saloon . . . combing for him through his haunts. . .

Having found him, Keefe had been content to progress with him from roadhouse to roadhouse, from saloon to saloon, from drink to drink—leisurely homeward. . .

"The drinks were so good, we just kept on, kind of slow."

"But listen to me, boys,—don't you think you ought to hurry on home now?"

"We've been gone so long—what difference will an extra hour make?"

They rolled each other about on the grass like dogs playing.

. . . . . .

I spent the ensuing week in quiet, writing hard on a short story, while here and there touching up and bettering "The Western Wife," and giving it a final re-typing for Whellen.

. . . . . .

"Well, you've certainly got yourself into a fix!"

Seldon caught me by the arm in a familiar, sly manner that I disliked. A watery smile split across his face. Then he grinned in a way that made me want to hit him.

Seeing a dusk of offense cloud my looks, his paw of conciliatory vulgarity clapped my back.

I learned from Seldon that, just before going off on his newest and latest bat,—Firth had showed up at the Health Home, his breath reeking, his feet tangled—and had sworn to him, Seldon, with all the jangled nerves and insane imagination of a dipsomaniac, that he, Firth, was fully aware, and had long been aware, that I was making up to his wife!

According to Seldon, the fixed idea had taken possession of Firth that he must seize immediate advantage of this opportunity to rid himself of his wife (the drunker he was, the deeper his unreasoning hatred of her), by hurrying in to New York and beginning divorce proceedings, mentioning me as corespondent. . .

Since I seemed to like notoriety and publicity, he would give me a belly-full of both, he further stated.

Firth, sober or nearly sober, proved a different husband from Firth drunk. Sober, he adored his wife. Drunk or sober, he needed her as much as his baby did. . .

But it was one of his obsessions, when inebriated, that he and his wife must go apart . . and at the moment, he had mixed me up with that obsession, through force of his mind's tagging on me the remembrance of my former notoriety.

I had been on the way to Firth's house, when Seldon met me and caught me by the arm. . .

"Good Lord! How long has Firth been gone?" I asked.

"He left for New York day before yesterday."

"Billy, if you're really my friend, as you claim, why didn't you inform me of this bit of insanity immediately?"

It increased my angry vexation to read in Seldon's sidelong, evasive glance that he rather believed in the possibility of my being intimate with Firth's wife.

I started forward to gain the Firth house, breaking into a lope. I must see Katie immediately. Perhaps she had known no more about her husband's insane resolve than I had, and she must be warned, so she could join me in taking immediate steps to stay him in the course of his headlong folly. . .

But before I started off, Seldon inquired—"Johnny,—don't be offended . . but didn't you?—wasn't there just a bit of truth?——"

A greenish smoulder in his eye completed the inquiry.

"Are you going crazy, too?" I shouted the question at him much louder and angrier than needed—to conceal the fact that, in spite of my disgust with myself for harboring the sneaky feeling—inside I was not entirely uncomplimented by his sly insinuation.

. . . . . .

I flew, leaping up the front porch of the Firth house.

Katie Firth was there, alone, with her baby. She was doing the washing. . .

As I suspected, she had not an inkling of her husband's alleged intent.

When I repeated what Seldon had said to me, she set her clothes basket down heavily.

"We'll take the next train to the City to find him. If he's gone to New York, he'll be putting up at Mrs. Gumber's."

Mrs. Gumber's was an old-fashioned theatrical boarding house. . .

" 'Keeley' 's a fool! He knows I love him and am faithful to him. It's all on account of the booze."

She had—a slip of the tongue—called her husband "Keeley" . . a nickname all of his friends called him by, because of the number of times he had taken the "cure" . . ineffectually.

Katie hurried into the bedroom to fix up.

I was to go with her.

There was no guessing what Jimmy Firth might do under the impulsion of a drunken, fixed idea.

Readied for the journey to the City, she came out of the bedroom, apologizing:

"I used to be—neater—before I married; you can't imagine, Johnny, what hopelessness and despair a booze-fighting husband can put a woman in!"

She laid her hand adorned with the gold wedding ring, dramatically to the top of her black velvet dress, as if in dumb attempt to hide the two buttons gone, the lack of which she had supplied by two safety pins, stuck inside to keep their brass from showing. . .

"The baby?"

"He's coming along."

"Mrs. Seldon might be willing to take care of him till we return."

"I can't bear to leave him out of my sight! He's—he's—really all I've got!"

She cried. Clumsily I patted her on the back. . .

"Come, Rolly,—go bye-bye with mamma!"

"Better let me carry him."

"No, you wouldn't know how."

Katie swung the child—that seemed half as big as herself,—up lightly, expertly,—and we were off.

. . . . . .

"At first his booze-fighting didn't bother me so much . . he was more gallant and romantic *then*, than when he was sober—*at first!*

"I always did have a softness for people who would say nice things to me, no matter what else they did. . .

"Once he came wabbling home with his arms full of flowers that

he'd picked, wild, from fields he'd passed . . he dropped them at my feet in a heap.

"I thought he was going crazy when he said, 'Katie, God forgive me, but here I am, drunk again—if you're mad at me, let these beautiful flowers that never drink anything but the clean dew, plead my cause for me!' "

"That was quite poetic, wasn't it?"

"—Poetic nothing! It was only the Irish in him."

She smiled ruefully through a splash of tears.

. . . . . .

"You see, when Jimmy's in this condition it's liable—lately especially—to bring out a nasty streak in him. He's liable to do or say anything, no matter how terrible, to anybody.

"So please don't feel harshly about it or be harsh with him.

"You know, certainly, what a nice person he CAN be, when he's fairly sober."

"Yes, Katie,—but that doesn't excuse what he's threatening to do to me—to you!

"If he once sees a lawyer about it, that lawyer, it being his business, will do all he can to confirm a vagary into a resolve——"

"Oh, my dear—" she laid one hand lightly on my sleeve while with the other she automatically steadied the rolling baby in her lap—"I'll wager he's by this time forgotten all about what he said to Seldon."

"I'm not so sure . . when a man's under the continued influence of alcohol he's liable to be hag-ridden by any folly that comes into his head."

"Don't I know though—I was only just suggesting——"

"I grudge very much dancing to a tune I've never asked for."

She looked up at me quickly at that,—giving me a look of gentle, amused coquetry, through sheer feminine instinct, not designedly.

The train rode jerkily as we talked; it stopped at every little station; the baby cried often; the car filled with thick, white, choking country dust and heat.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Gumber, proprietor of Gumber's theatrical boarding house, came to the door herself, in answer to our ring. She came, with vestiges of cold cream on her face where it had seeped into the heavy

wrinkles of a flabby, aging, but determined face . . just as if she had been laying the base for a make-up, before stepping out on the stage.

Her fat fingers were thick with rings.

It was easy to see that she had been in "the profession"—herself—a fact she soon let us know by word as well as by appearance.

She was evidently near-sighted. Her eyes had a cloudy appearance.

Not recognizing Mrs. Firth, but aware of the baby on her arm, she took us for a married pair, said she was reluctant to have babies about because of their squalling, but volunteered, nevertheless, to show us a room.

But Katie's inquiring if Jimmy were there, evoked tardy, apologetic, relieved recognition.

"Yes, your husband's certainly here, and with bells on,—Mrs. Firth! . . I've made it clear to him if it wasn't him but somebody else, he'd of been bounced out of here long ago!"

"Then he's?—he's?—" wavered Katie, pretending surprise, in an effort at apology for him.

"HIM? . . it's TWO OF 'EM . . full as ticks, and staggerin' in and out, all hours of the day and night for more!"

It was evident that this was one of the intervals during which they had staggered out "for more."

We sat there in the room and waited. We did not have long to wait.

Soon both men burst in, one helping the other along, when both needed help . . singing and quarrelling at once.

. . . . . .

"What the hell did you come here for?" asked Jimmy bitterly of his wife.

Jimmy . . reeling . . and seeing his wife, not me. . .

"Let me talk to him, Johnny," she bade me, in a low voice; "you step out for a moment."

"I want a word or two with him!" I responded, grim,—not going.

"PLEASE," she pleaded, a note of exasperation in her voice.

. . . . . .

I waited in the hallway, sitting on a foot-worn turn of stair.

Inside, their voices were droning on and on. . .

Suddenly I considered myself wildly affronted.

The sordidness of the place! the heat of the day; oppressively humid; my many defeats; my own thwarted life; thwarted even in my poetry—all combined to strike me into great, hysterical irritation——

Why should I let "this rat" get away with it on a plea of drunkenness?

"So drunk he didn't know what he was doing?"

A man was never that way. When he was, he was too drunk to do anything—he only just didn't give a damn! Why blame it on drink!

I thrust the door open—on a wretched scene.

Jimmy had collapsed.

Death-sick, he sprawled, inert, across the bed on his belly, his wife's patient, steadying hand under his forehead, while he puked, not clear of the bed entirely, into a chamber held for him by Keefe, who had reacted in the other direction—apparently cold sober in a trice . . dignified . . quietly, pityingly helpful. . .

When Firth finally flopped back on the pillows, exhausted, his face matched the soiled greyish-white of the lace curtain at the windows.

"Gee," he murmured, "one more heave, and I'd of thrown up my socks."

He smiled quaintly, eyes closed.

"Yes, yes, Jimmy—you're all right now!" Katie, soothing.

"That's the work of the stuff you were drinking before I caught up to you, you rogue. You never could tell good whiskey," remarked Keefe, rallying roughly, trying to be kindly, "that's why you need *me* about."

. . . . . .

After a long, long interval, Firth turned his weak attention to me. He fixed me, surprised, with a dulled eye.

"Hullo, Gregory!—What you doing here?"

Seeing how sick he was, my resolve was now to wait awhile before taxing him with his admitted intention.

But my reply was untactful——

"Wait till you're better!"

The transition those words evoked in the sick man was startling. He shot to a sitting posture. His hair bristled, his weakness was replaced by insane energy.

"To hell with that generous stuff! Spit out what you have to say, right now!"

"Johnny!" ejaculated Mrs. Firth softly, pleadingly,—signalling with her eyes toward the door, asking me to go. Then, seeing I stood immovable, looking at us in turn in gentle, tortured appeal. . .

I was enraged at the gratuitousness, the injustice, of having been involved in such a mad, humiliating situation.

("The next time I make friends with a drunk, let me know!")

Firth transferred his insane glare of malignity from me to his wife——

"'Johnny'!" he sneered vindictively, "so she calls you 'Johnny' already!"

. . . . . .

His casting it up against his wife,—her calling me by my first name—it would have been laughable, if his crazy, crying tone had not rendered it tragic. . .

Everybody called me "Johnny" . . nearly everybody who met me took to calling me by my first name right off.

Sometimes I didn't like it. It inferred a naïve quality, a simplicity akin to simpleness in me, that I was learning not to like.

. . . . . .

Both Katie and Mike Keefe looked toward me, appeal in their eyes:

"Can't you see he's not his normal self! . . for God's sake!" their eyes spoke dumbly, urging me to forbear answering.

I turned to go, bridling myself with silence . . meaning to return later.

But the crazed man would have none of my departure.

"Scared out, eh?" he snarled.

That was too much to take, even from a man on the verge of delirium tremens. . .

"Scared out, nothing!" whipping myself up—"scared out, nothing!—Firth!—I only don't want an unjust scandal brought down on my head!"

"Ha! —thought you liked publicity?"

He rose on stiff arms, glaring at me.

"Please—Jimmy!—Please!" Mrs. Firth interposed.

"So you try to protect the skunk," returned Firth.

"For Christ's sake, Jimmy, stop being a nut! Shut up!" roared Keefe, to shock his friend out of his folly.

Another swift transition . . Firth breaking into a wail, burying his face in the pillow. . .

Slowly he turned, facing us again,—while we three stood, stunned and appalled.

"I see . . I see it at last!" he sobbed,—"you're all joined together, conspiring against me. . .

"You, too, Mike, helping this fellow to take my wife from me——

"It's too much. . .

"But I'll get away—I'll get away!——"

The poor wretch began trailing his legs off the bed, to escape from an imaginary ill.

Keefe saw it was the time for a gentle application of the full force of his brawny Australian strength; he bore Firth back—and it was no easy task to handle the drink-crazed man. He bore him back, all the while pleading with astute detachment——

"Come on, Jimmy! . . for God's sake, Jimmy! Listen, Jimmy," he begged cannily—"kicking up a row like this—do you want to bring Mrs. Gumber in on us, and have her chuck us out, so we'll have no place to come to and be ourselves, when we're in New York?

"Shh! I think I hear her coming now! Pretend you're asleep!"

Firth fell in with the suggestion. He lay back on the pillow with a wan, crafty smile.

A knock did come. . .

"Yes, Mrs. Gumber . . I know . . but he's getting all right now . . yes, Mrs. Gumber!" the susurration ceased; the door closed.

"Who was it, Mike?" whispered Firth, keeping his eyes closed.

"Shh!—the Old Girl herself!" . .

I beckoned Keefe apart.

"Is there anything I can do?" I whispered, quite ashamed of myself.

"Yes, run quick and bring the nearest doctor!"

I hurried out, while Mrs. Firth sat in the corner, baring her breasts to the baby to quiet it.

. . . . . .

When Firth recovered it had gone entirely out of his head—his suspicion, and his morbid scheme. . .

We were back in the country.

"Why don't you come to visit us any more?"

"Mike, you ought to know well enough why I don't."

"Jimmy's forgotten it entirely. It's dropped out of his mind like the bottom out of an old wooden bucket. He feels hurt because you don't come to see us any more."

"Yes,—and on any occasion, he might start it up all over again—quite likely on the next big drunk of his!"

"—That fool of a Seldon!" exclaimed Keefe.

Straightway I asked Mike Keefe why he had spoken so. And I learned that Seldon, after his crude manner, had "kidded" Firth once or twice—asking him jocularly if he didn't think it dangerous to have me around loose at his (Firth's) place so often? . .

"Seldon's kidding stuck in Jimmy's noodle, and came out, when he got boozy."

"I'll fix Seldon for that!"

. . . . . .

My chance to get even soon came . . one Saturday afternoon. . .

Going into the General Store, at Cottswold, to buy a couple of pounds of corn meal, I was passing by Seldon's Health Home, when I heard a hub-bub in a nearly field. . .

It was Seldon, who had brought out the gloves.

An excited group surrounded a pair of village youths who were at the moment flailing at each other wildly, making their arms go like old-fashioned windmill sails. . .

They had been running in, head-on, not looking. One had bumped his head violently against the other's nose, bringing forth a rush of blood.

Both were a sight for a Roman mob. They were becoming enraged at each other, though they had, of course, begun the mill in good humor.

Amid hooting and laughter, the fight was stopped.

Seldon prided himself on his reputed knowledge of the ring . . brought it to the fore, on the lamest conversational occasion . . he had worked as a rubber in the stables of several prizefighters.

While I hovered on the outskirts he persuaded a slight, fair gawk of a lad, no match for him in height, reach, or strength—to put on the gloves.

"Go easy, Billy," requested the lad. "I never had 'em on before except onct or twict."

"Come on! Don't be afraid. I'll tap light."

But instead of tapping lightly,—warming up and whetting his secret savagery on his opponent's unseasoned clumsiness, Seldon licked in and belabored him about bloodily . . giving him a black eye and a split lip. . .

The fellow backed off, dropping his hands, stumbling. . while the bunch—some of them laughed uneasily, a few protested. . .

"—Sorry, but I lose my head easily. I oughtn't really to box at all!" boasted Seldon. He still kept the gloves tied on.

I was hot and cold in successive waves, all a-tremble from my customary confusion of timidity and combativeness evoked by seeing a fight. He spied me on the outskirts of the group.

"How about you, Johnny?—want to warm up a little?"

"Sure! I'll go a couple of rounds, if you'll promise to take it easier."

As soon as I had the gloves transferred to mine from the other fellow's hands, I saw the wicked, greenish gleam in Billy Seldon's eye, and I licked in, after the preliminary handshake, without waiting,—trying to catch Seldon on the jump, and keeping in mind, to harden me, the detrimental gossip he had started. . .

His gloves spread on either side of his jaws, he backed. . .

"Thought you said 'take it easy'?"

"Did I? Well, I take it back . . take it anyway you want to, Billy!"

"Oh, if that's what you're looking for!" and Seldon leaped in at me. . .

I was a bit frightened, but I pitched my timidity out. I summoned up all the lean, hard wolf in me that my regimen of daily exercise, my solitary outdoor life had fostered. This was the easier to do because I had noticed, just for an instant, a betraying flicker of fear in Seldon's eye . . which he had showed—when he had been given, by the merest fluke, a good clout or two by his previous antagonist . . at one time I had shouted to the lad—"follow it up; that's the way. . keep at him"—on the delivery of a chance "haymaker."

Despite the fact that, at first, Seldon found my jaw with uncanny persistence, sending stars out in swarms over my head, I stood to it,

slugging back. Though I might not have been so aggressive if I had not remembered *that* one look of his which I had detected.

For a space we stood toe to toe, walloping.

I was fetching him every so often with a blow he couldn't seem to avoid—a steady, long left hook to the jaw and the side of the head.

Though my nose got bloodied first, his soon got bloodier.

He began to back away, still exchanging blow for blow.

Then shifted and passed the look that I was watching for, the ghastly smoulder of begging-off in the eyes that he couldn't control.

I flew at him ferociously. I caught him once, smash, full in the mouth. I caught him twice more, and it became a bloody gash.

He covered his face with his forearms, crouching. . .

"Whale him in the guts, Johnny!"

But I stopped. I stepped back.

Silently, and amid the silence of the group, who sensed that some grudge had been in the process of settling, we held out our gloves to have them untied. . .

I think Seldon understood what had been up, from our first impact. . .

Good fellow that he was in a multitude of respects—that would restrain him for a while from going around garrulously,—from his loose, speculative gossip——

"Loose, speculative gossip?"

Myself—had I never been remiss in the same way?

I had a bad Puritan night, that night, for having visited humiliation on him—for having visited humiliation on any fellow being, for that matter!

Besides, I owed much to Billy Seldon: he had twice fitted me up with a shack, had let me be lax in payment of the exceedingly nominal rent, had otherwise befriended me. . .

. . . . . .

In the City,—to deliver the completed manuscript of "The Western Wife," pretending to have just brought it to completion.

I left it for Whellen at his office, then proceeded to market a few lyrics at the offices of the various magazines.

The few dollars I procured by selling one or two poems gave me a feeling of cocksure and secure success. . .

I strode along, head up, singing the Marseillaise to myself.

. . . . . .

Whellen dropped me a note, at Nough's. I was to come and see him in reference to "The Western Wife." . .

Seeing him, I was grievously disappointed to learn that he did not care for the poem for his magazine, "The Agora."

Now I was not going to be given the other forty I had been counting on.

"But, Whellen, it's the best thing I've ever done; it's the greatest——"

" '—poem ever written by an American'!" he mimicked me acidly. "I know, Mr. Gregory,—that's what you say every time!"

"—And how can I pay you back the money you've advanced?" I proceeded, ignoring the thrust.

"—As for paying me back. I'm a good gambler. I took a chance."

Whellen went through the motion of crossing his left ankle high on his right thigh, like the Degas Ballet Dancer. He felt at the fresh flower in his buttonhole. . .

Hating the patronizing manner in which Whellen had used me, I was mad all through.

Also I was sick at the pit of the stomach with an unreasoning sense of defeat . . the old life-panic was coming upon me anew. So I proceeded to rid myself of it, by shifting it defensively into a rage leveled at Whellen, who, for all his cockiness (much of which was a mere mannerism and not offensively meant) was trying to be my friend to the best of his ability.

My imagination immediately transformed him into a stumbling block in the path of my literary progress.

Damn him, airily teetering there on his swivel chair, leaning back, ankle thwart leg, patting that cut flower in his lapel. . .

I took a rapid step toward him, my eye glittering in menace.

I brought my fist down, bang, on the leaf of his desk, knocking books, sending manuscripts sliding to the floor; angry words and epithets poured forth from my mouth, attended by a sick foreknowledge of what a mistake was being made by me.

Whellen rose, indignant and straight, his face as pale as the flower in his buttonhole.

"My dear Mr. Gregory,—in the words of Tallyrand to Napoleon, all I can answer is, that you're not a gentleman!"

"Whellen,—no one could be a gentleman, and at the same time have effective dealings with you!"

I snatched up my manuscript and stamped out, swearing volubly to hide my chagrin and the shame that was beginning to well up inside me.

I ramped out through the outer office where a noise of rattling typewriters increased to a sort of stampeding trample—the three girls there trying to indicate by their intense application that they had not even with their ears, participated in the altercation . . preternaturally engrossed in their typing.

But, that they might be sure to hear distinctly,—enjoying my seemingly unwilling gallery and wishing to be the big lad that dared beard the great publisher in his sanctum, as I passed on out through the bookshop I shouted backward a few loud and lurid parting epithets.

. . . . . .

Whellen's manager, a withered little man having furrows of nervous exhaustion riddling his forehead, hurried up to me, rubbing his hands, smiling blandly, evidently enjoying as far as he dared his employer's discomfiture.

"There, there! Mr. Gregory,—don't be too worried over your quarrel with Whellen," he remarked with soft enjoyment, "come back in a few days and you can patch it up . . all Whellen's authors have regular fights with him . . and often with reason, my boy!" he added in a confidential tone.

"Don't try to smoothe it over," I bellowed at the startled man, "I hate myself; I could kill myself."

. . . . . .

Back at "Perfection City."

I lay in my trunks, reading.

"What are you reading?" asked a strange child's shrill, coaxing voice.

I looked up edgewise to see first a mop of flaming red hair tied up in a disorderly psyche-knot. The girl-child wore a one-piece bathing suit. I had never seen her about, before.

I was reading Shakespeare, I gravely informed her. She squatted

silent, observing me with grave, large eyes, of the same deep-blue color that the small butterfly's wings possessed, that poised not far off on a flower.

She volunteered the miscellaneous information—that she was a good swimmer; that her father was a socialist and her mother, too; that they had just come from California; that they were staying in a house on the side of the lake toward town, that a friend of her papa's had let them have because they were poor; that her name was "Lydia"—"Lydia Montgomery."

"You haven't told me your name yet?"

Her hand slid confidingly into mine. . .

A slight, exquisite nubility showed through her bathing suit.

. . . . . .

There recurred to me again and again, the next few days, an anecdote Bennett Whellen had related me concerning a wealthy friend of his. . .

We had been discussing women, fidelity, marriage—Whellen and I—considering how seldom monogamy turned out successfully in the inner, spiritual sense, not to speak of the physical,—which was almost always a failure . . as was of course not surprising when two individuals totally different combined in one—if they honestly tried to live up to the mystical doctrine of the One Flesh taught by the Church. . .

"Of course one can compromise—accept the form—outwardly live up to it, like most of the world."

"Mr. Whellen, I could never compromise. I must be openly what I am, live as I believe."

"My friend felt so, too. . .

"My friend who is one of the few men I know who has made a complete success of monogamy."

Then followed the story of how Whellen's friend had deliberately selected a beautiful girl while she was yet a child, had had her carefully educated under his supervision with the sole idea of her becoming his wife when she grew old enough.

He had ultimately married her, and it had panned out beautifully, Whellen averred.

The girl, now a grown woman, not only still adored the man, but lived, moved, and had all her being in him. . .

"But, before you attempt to emulate my friend, Mr. Gregory," Whellen assured me, "you have to be first sure of yourself—that you first possess the true monogamous instinct—which most men do not!"

. . . . . .

A few rods below the dam, near an ancient, disused mill, there stood an old wooden bridge that arched over the sluggish pond-lily-laden stream that drained lake Emily.

Sometimes I went under this bridge to do my exercises, shedding my trunks,—when I didn't care to go further away, back into the woods . . in the early morning, when few were up and about.

I could jump, quick, further under, when I heard any one coming. . .

The main item that brought me to the bridge was that I had discovered deep, natural mud there. There I could lie, alone and undisturbed, in a mud bath, for hours, in the heat of the day, too, lapped about in thick, cool mud—lathered black all over . . sensing the mighty magnetic currents of the earth powerfully and strengtheningly sweeping through me. . .

. . . . . .

One morning, after the birds had waked me earlier than usual, I stood carelessly out a bit from under the concealment of the bridge. I was sure no one was about.

I had just finished my arm-exercises when I detected the pat-pat of naked feet. I shot under the bridge. I waited for the feet to go by. All was quiet overhead. The feet must have stopped there . . but why should they have stopped?

Slowly, cautiously, I emerged.

"I caught you!" It was Lydia's voice.

I leaped back instantly.

"What are you doing down there?" she called, over the bridge railing.

"—taking my exercises," I called back.

"I'm coming down, too!"

"You mustn't. I haven't any clothes on."

"I don't care!"

I had just time to whip into my trunks. . .

"Tell me, why are people ashamed to be caught without their clothes on?"

After a moment's hesitation I considered, with rare caution for me, that perhaps it would be best not to discuss the question. . .

"I know what my father and mother look like . . daddy says children should be brought up to know what people are like."

"Don't you think you'd better run home now, Lydia?"

"No, I don't!" she answered emphatically.

I put off taking my mud bath. Instead I climbed the bank and played tag.

Lydia's queer, little, soft female legs carried her about, shifting and turning . . she squealed and laughed, happy and animal. . .

"What got you up so early?"

"The sunshine coming in on me. . . Everybody else was asleep. I sneaked into my bathing suit and ran out . . do you go down there every morning?"

"No, not every morning."

"—guess I'll go home . . breakfast must be ready!"

. . . . . .

Whenever she spied me, Lydia ran up to me. The other children, seeing Lydia playing with me, came to play with me, too.

They coaxed me to tell them stories, and they rode on my back.

"Git up—old donkey."

"Whoa—Gee!"

I discovered that playing with the children refreshed me, blew away the cobwebs. It also inspired me to write. As wine did. And as a woman.

. . . . . .

I had thought that, after our quarrel, Whellen would never have anything to do with me any more, but it turned out not to be so.

On his own initiative he wrote me, asking me to drop around, when I had occasion to be in Town again.

I was overjoyed by his forgiving friendliness. Our clash seemed to have begotten a better understanding."

. . . . . .

"Your 'Brother of Jesus' is getting some fine reviews . . the critics say you have a fine feeling for classical English . . they're surprised at your scholarship. . .

"All of which adds balm to the fact that four hundred and fifty copies are all that have been sold, and that are likely to be sold."

What he had sought to see me for, was, to urge me to go and have a talk with Ostwald Selfridge, the new managing editor of "The Elite. . ."

Perhaps he might purchase my "Western Wife."

"You don't mean to tell me that Tanner's out?"

I had liked George Tanner, the former managing editor. He was gentle of demeanor and courteous. He had paid top prices for poetry. He had never tried to cheapen the wares of authors.

"Tanner isn't out. He's merely taken a back seat."

"That's too bad. Tanner was a gentleman."

"I believe in being a gentleman myself," he glanced at me, smiling allusively. Then we smiled mutually. He continued, "but it takes more qualities than just being a gentleman to run a magazine successfully.

"Selfridge, as managing editor, is putting steam into "The Elite," and also shaping its policy along more Continental, literary lines. . .

"Daring, too. . . . along with his sound literary judgment. . . sometimes mischievously so. . .

"He printed an amusing story, in a recent issue, of a girl that tried to go wrong, and couldn't . . no matter how hard she tried. . .

"I've been busy lining up Selfridge for you.

"I'd go over and see him to-day, if I were you. He's interested."

I followed Whellen's advice, but I shall always be glad that, when I sent my name in, I asked to see Tanner, not Selfridge; though a baser impulse stirred me to curry favor with Selfridge, the present man in the sun. . .

Tanner was another Merton, without the instinctive opportunism that I suspected Merton of . . perhaps wrongly. . .

When Tanner greeted you, his accompanying, ironic smile was belied by mild, painfully seeking eyes. There was settled, gentle earnestness in his bearing, and yet a sense of bafflement.

He, too, dressed unobtrusively well.

"I'm not the chief here at present," Tanner instantly advised me, taking my hand warmly, "but come on in and let me introduce you to Selfridge. He'll take care of you."

"I know; Whellen sent me over to see Selfridge about a narrative poem. But I chose to see you first." I spoke with dislike, of Selfridge, whom I had not yet met.

"You mustn't be irrationally prejudiced."

. . . . . .

I had liked and disliked the new editor of "The Elite." Liked, in spite of myself, his prodigious spirit, disliked his rapid, vociferous striding about, his insolent, rosy complexion, his waved slight moustache of palish gold.

The fact that he had offered me one hundred dollars for a narrative poem based on the Kansas Wheat Harvest did not cause me to think more of him, for he had done it in the peremptory fashion of the snob ordering a suit from his tailor . . and, after perfunctorily glancing through it, he had handed back "The Western Wife," announcing that it "hadn't enough color in it," was "too suggestive of Masefield."

"Damn Masefield!" I muttered.

For that was what Whellen had said, and Lephil had observed.

I was literally afraid to procure a work of his, for fear it might be true.

. . . . . .

I noticed a queer change in the attitude of the inhabitants of the summer colony toward me, on my return, that I at first imputed to the fertility of my own imagination. . .

"You'd better look out, Johnny," I advised myself, "you're acquiring a bad persecution complex."

But, no,—there *was* developing an uncanny atmosphere about me, a veritable wall of taboo and hostility . . for some unguessed reason. . .

When I called "hello" to several of the men, their greeting in return was stiff and perfunctory . . the women, they averted their faces, hurrying on . . when I called to the children I had been playing with they ran away with frightened laughter. . .

At last I glimpsed Lydia, her red hair shining like an aureole, down by the lake shore.

I started down to speak to her, but she gave a rush away from me, squealing mischievously.

"Lydia!" I appealed . . but she had disappeared.

A chill premonition of something indefinable and monstrous gathered thicker about me.

It occurred to me to seek out Billy Seldon. He would be sure to have the wind of it, as soon as anything scandalous began blowing abroad.

But he saved me the trouble of going to him by his coming to me.

That suspicion that I would not let come inside my brain because of its very monstrousness, he confirmed: the tale was wafting about, as yet, luckily, among a few,—that I had, standing forth naked, invited Lydia down under the bridge, not troubling to cover myself.

"What a rotten lie!" I choked with rage and I trembled with fright.

"Seldon—you haven't helped circulate this?" I entreated, threateningly.

He looked honestly into my eyes:

"No—but—" he paused, troubled, concerned.

"But what?"

"My advice to you is to beat it in to New York as quickly as you can. Don't bother about your books. I'll pack them up and send them to whatever address you give——"

I thought swiftly. Seldon's advice was the worst possible. If I acted on it, people would think the scandal true; it would look like, would be like—running away!

"Seldon! You don't believe?—surely?——"

"No, Gregory,—I don't believe it . . you may be a fool in lots of ways, but I'm sure you're not that sort of fool." Then, his gross sense of humor getting the upper hand, despite the grave seriousness of my situation—"now, if it had been a *big* girl or a woman—"; he guffawed, throwing his mouth wide open.

"You damned clown, you! can't you see this is nothing to joke about?"

He settled his face straight. He assumed a sober and hurt expression:

"You're right. It is serious—more serious than you guess. . . I know how kids lie, and how grown-up folks lose their senses and believe them."

"Do you mean to say Lydia—told lies!"

I had thought of an exaggerated story started; I had not thought of deliberate lying. . .

Immediately, my voice faltering, I envisaged the nasty mess impending. I grew shaky as jelly with funk.

"Lydia's daddy told me she said to him——"

—As immediately, I foresaw that it was no time for panic, but high time for vigorous action on my part to forestall any concerted, hysterical group-action. . .

"Come!" I grabbed Billy Seldon's forearm, dragging him impetuously with me.

"Where are you going?"

"Directly over to see Lydia's father and mother—and you're going with me, to be my witness!"

"You'd better not do that, Johnny,—you'd better not see them!"

"What else is there to do!

"This damnable, dangerous nonsense—I've either got to stop it at its source, or—" the alternative did not need vociferation.

On I went, as if wading up to my neck against a swift, rising flood,—Seldon now trailing, solemnly curious, behind me . . solemn, yet eager for a fresh fund of gossip.

I walked right in at the door of the cottage. It was open.

Montgomery, dark, tall to emaciation, his eyebrows grown together in a solid, straight bar of black, rose from a typewriter at which he had been heavily pounding. Before he could say or do a thing I was right at him.

"Mr. Montgomery, I've come over to see you——"

"Yes?" the quick monosyllable clicked metallically in between my words.

He measured me from feet to head in dark hostility; both his fists clenched; the knuckles reddening; the arms stiffened.

But before he could deliver the intended blow, I stepped in close with an assurance and easiness I did not feel, making him step back from me; had *I* stepped back he would have struck.

"First, Mr. Montgomery,—listen to a few words from me . . it won't hurt . . you're a Socialist . . a Radical . . I speak to you as to a man with a little more reasonableness in him than you can find in the average——"

He relaxed slightly.

"Yes, Montgomery—" Seldon spoke up.

Montgomery tensed again.

"Billy! Please!!!—let me handle this!" I begged of Seldon.

"Yes, let's see what he has to say!"

. . . . . .

Not mincing words, I spoke of the fact that, if he knew childhood, he (Montgomery) ought also to know the unwarranted fancies that children often weave—stories with danger in them—especially where leads have been given them by the sophisticated questions their elders sometimes thrust in among their ignorant prattle. . .

How innocent people have often gone to jail, been stigmatized for life, or had darker catastrophes close upon them, through lies children have been incited to tell, by the evil imaginations of older people.

I never waxed more eloquent, more persuasive. . .

Lydia's mother came into the room. I perceived that she had at first, in contempt of me, absented herself. But her curiosity got the better of her. Lydia's flame-red head was glimpsed standing behind her mother. She peeked from behind.

"—But won't you let me speak to Lydia, direct?" I begged. . .

"Yes, folks; I know Gregory's all right . . that there's some dreadful mistake been made." There was a clear, friendly ring in Seldon's declaration that, this time, helped the situation.

The mother looked at the father, the father looked at the mother.

They decided with their eyes.

"All right! speak with her!" allowed Montgomery, though dubious and defensive.

Her mother reached around and pulled Lydia out in front.

I frankly, in a simple and friendly manner, appealed to the child, almost as I would have to a grown woman . . asking her if she really wished to bring me into such frightful trouble . . asking her please, please to acknowledge the truth. . .

When I—we—waited for her answer, a new fright momentarily took me . . suppose she should, morbidly or pridefully, persist in her lie. . .!

But she did not. Between sobs she admitted that she had "made most of it up. . ."

"Come here! you're going to catch a good licking for this, young lady!" Her father reached for her.

She slipped behind the bulwark of her stoutish mother,—wailing miserably.

"Please don't whip her," I pleaded, "when she's made everything all right again . . she didn't know the seriousness——"

"Have a chair, Mr. Gregory?"

"Thanks!"

He reached me a box of cigarettes. I lit one.

We all sat down.

"Phew, but it's hot!"

"Yes,—it's pretty hot!"

"Have a drink, Mr. Gregory?"

"Thanks." For once I had no words left.

"Martha bring out that bottle of Port in the cupboard."

Mrs. Montgomery poured out four glasses. Seldon said, though he kept strictly off meats and all stimulants, he would make the present occasion an exception.

"Now, Lydia," bade her father severely, "go over and ask Mr. Gregory his pardon, and tell him how sorry you are."

The child, reciting how sorry she was, looked more the little woman than ever.

. . . . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery and myself discussed the coming revolution, while Seldon said that "seeing that the talk was getting intellectual," he "guessed" he'd "best be going."

I was asked to stay for lunch.

We had another drink of Port all around.

It was then that one of my impulses, ever at hand, urged me to have a talk with the parents about what I had been considering concerning their daughter. About the beautiful red-headed mate I was seeking, and how Lydia might grow up to be the one . . and how I would become a great writer and would write stories and novels till I possessed a good income, and help pay for her education. . .

But somehow a touch of better sense forewarned me that, if I did,—despite their being at present so friendly, it might awaken

a suspicion that perhaps Lydia had lied the second time, and had spoken truth, the first!

. . . . . .

Resolutely, I stayed on at Perfection City two weeks longer. But I admit that, at the end of that time, it was rather a pleasure to depart. I only stayed longer to face down the last danger of the scandal. But, though now denied at its source, it had come into an ugly life and vitality of its own, creating an atmosphere that a tougher spirit than mine would have found hard to combat. . .

For several months my nightly dream was of a cursing, shouting mob pursuing me through swampy underbrush. with guns and a rope.

. . . . . .

But all the while, under stimulus of the excitement, I was writing my long poem "The Harvesters" for Ostwald Selfridge, editor of "The Elite." It proved of sounder poetic craftsmanship than my previous narrative verse, but, consciously, in it, I aimed, for once, definitely at popularity. Though I would not have admitted that to any one.

. . . . . .

Ostwald Selfridge had accepted the poem, he said. . .

"For my part," Tanner spoke, impersonally frank, "I don't consider your 'Harvesters' even a good second-rate poem,—it smells of deliberate, skillful manufacture, with an eye toward the Public. For the sake of your real reputation it ought not to be printed."

My egotism resented secretly his appraisal, yet I knew he was just. . .

"—smells of manufacture, like new leather!" continued Tanner. . .

"Don't listen to Tanner's talk!" cried Selfridge brutally, and to my amazement, before the whole office force—"his critical taste's abominably old-fashioned and demoded."

Tanner wheeled as if struck a blow, turning pale with an anger that he restrained; with a look calling attention to the stenographers as a curb to retaliation. Then, frigidly contemptuous, he strolled away.

. . . . . .

"Look here, Mr. Selfridge," I had been reading the proofs of "The Harvesters," and had hurried to the office of "The Elite"

considerably aggrieved—"Some one has made several changes in the body of the poem, and the last stanza has been dropped entirely and a new one substituted."

"Guilty!" returned Selfridge. "It was I who made the changes, and I who made the substitution . . because your final stanza was a rotten bourgeois thing: fancy John Gregory's perpetrating as a last line:

'And wife and children were his one desire!' "

"But that was my hero's sole desire!" I defended, without conviction, "he was nothing but a conventional college youngster, in the West to work in the harvest. Can't a character of mine hold opinions different from my own?"

I was inwardly ashamed of myself, nevertheless, for I had ended with that line, deliberately playing for Middle Class popularity. . .

"—anyhow, the stanza I wrote and substituted's better than yours."

Honesty forced me to admit it was. "But that doesn't give you the right to tinker with another's creation."

I started gathering up both proof and manuscript of my poem.

This thing must stop right where it had begun. I must not write what people wanted, but what came from my own creative sincerity. And I really must not submit to this Nietzschean's arrogant presumption in attempting to rewrite my verse for me.

I had fought with other editors, and won, over the same issue.

Why should I let Selfridge of "The Elite" bully me into making his magazine the exception?

I started out, my heart sinking. For where else could I sell so long a poem?

To my relief, Selfridge grabbed me by the arm.

"Come! Come! Gregory! don't act like a Prima Donna!"

This remark stung me into renewed resistance——

"I'm not acting like a Prima Donna. Only, I'm writing my own poetry myself——"

"Yes," put in Tanner, who, shocked, could no longer hold back out of it, "Gregory's quite right."

"Mind your business!" Selfridge shouted rudely, "who has the final say here? I have, not you any more! I'm trying to turn the

wreck you've made of 'The Elite' into a real magazine again. . .

"Miss Gilden! where the hell's Miss Gilden?" Selfridge, twirling the tiny ends of his blond, waxed moustache,—shouted the obstreperous inquiry at the panic-stricken girls in the office. . .

Miss Gilden stepped up briskly, but imperturbably. She alone was not to be bullied. She had seen many changes in the offices of "The Elite," and, evidently, expected to see a few more——

"Yes, Mr. Selfridge?" the slightest intimation of irony in her voice.

"O, Miss Gilden," Selfridge's voice took on the least tinge of deference, "make out a check for sixty dollars for Mr. Gregory—he's in a hurry for it."

I choked, remonstrating; though I *was* in a hurry for it, I had not yet confided my state of hurry—"sixty dollars, Mr. Selfridge? you promised me a hundred!"

"Well, I won't pay you a hundred, when your poem's turned out not to be worth more than sixty."

Swallowing hard, I accepted the sixty.

. . . . . .

I knew a group of young newspaper men and magazine writers from the West—from Kansas and from Missouri—who lived on Gramercy Square, in several expensive large apartments they shared. . .

Infrequently I visited them, when I was in need of boasting about my literary prowess to bolster up my courage—or in need of a good dinner.

They would take me out, combining a sense of superiority and an awed patronage of genius. Often I borrowed a dollar of them.

All of them suffered from bad literary consciences because of the immense amount of truck, that like laborers in a factory, they turned out weekly, at so much per word.

They were always poking fun at the writer who stood by his literary integrity, inferentially thus defending their literary prostitution.

"Why, look here, Gregory! Shakespeare wrote for money—and all the other Elizabethans. Defoe was a potboiler . . Goldsmith, a literary hack.

"Come out of it, Gregory, you haven't a leg to stand on."

" 'Did Shakespeare so? then the less Shakespeare he!' " I flung a quotation from Browning at them. . .

In my defense of the conscientious literary artist I was as much trying to make amends to myself for having perpetrated "The Harvesters," as, inversely, in attacking the authentic writer, my friends were attempting to justify themselves. . .

Loathing myself for my lapse into meretriciousness, I spent the next six weeks on the sixty dollars husbanded frugally—spent the next six weeks working on my huge epic meant to be destructive of the monogamic group and the home, to be entitled "The Family."

. . . . . .

Janice Godman rose from her chair aghast, when I narrated my last adventure at Physical Perfection City, explaining why I had come back to the City for good. . .

Then she collapsed into her chair again, overwhelmed with the humorous aspects of the situation.

I joined in her merriment. Once in a while I enjoyed the faculty of seeing myself as others saw me. . .

Seriously, she asked:

"Do women seem as difficult to you as all that?—that you consider bringing one up from childhood, trained to be your mate?" she was laughing still, though serious in her query.

"No. I trust women, like and believe in them . . though I've already suffered a few amatory reverses, I don't hesitate admitting the fault largely my own . . I'm not at all like our friend, Rankin. . ."

"But what gave you the idea——?"

"Whellen put it into my head,—and what I had read in Rousseau, before him!"

. . . . . .

A month afterward I received this "Round Robin" from those whom I had known at Perfection City: indited by Seldon and signed by the rest.

"Dear Johnny:—

"I am well and hope you are the same. The birds are still singing, but it seems different, with you away.

"Hope you got your trunk-full of books.

"You told me to hold them for the rent, but I don't want to hold them, Johnny, even though you do owe me some rent yet for my shack. They ain't no use to me, and they might be to you.

"When you can pay me, do so, but in the meanwhile, don't worry.

"We miss you here. Jimmy Firth said only yesterday, 'well, after all, say what you will about old Gregory,—he certainly can stir up things.'

"It's been pretty dull since you left.

"Love and best regards from:

"Billy Seldon,
"Jenny Seldon,
"Jimmy Firth,
"Katie Firth,
"Mike Keefe."

According to their wont, Firth and Keefe added cartoons.

. . . . . .

The Radical Club was moving to the Village, toward which all the new Bohemian life was turning for quarters, the rents being low.

When I walked into The Radical Club's new quarters on Macdougal Street I came upon its moving spirit, Frank Grayson . . the more robust of the two bearded men whom I had met on being first introduced to Janice Godman in Trotter's. . .

Grayson was superintending the settling and appropriate placing of the furniture and effects of the Club.

He was full of his characteristic guffawing and cracking of broad jests.

And who else should there be with him—beside the negress who worked as maid and charwoman for the Club—who else but the one person I wished to see—Beryl Landiss! . . Beryl, bustling about in all her businesslike tininess . . wearing a blue cloth tight about her small blonde head to keep the dust out of her hair, and still as good-looking with it on! I was certain she would not have worn it if she had not been.

"You seem to think a lot of the little 'watch-fob'," whispered Grayson huskily, as Beryl stepped into the kitchen to rinse out the dustrag, "and I'm for it, Johnny, my boy!

"Nail her, and hit it off with her right away! Just grab her and take her, that's the only way! otherwise some one else more enterprising will get her.

"It'ud do you good to settle down, secure, with some woman, for a while . . even if it turns out to be one so small you'll have to get up in the night and shake out the sheets to find her."

"Frank, mind your own business!—you have no right speculating——"

But Grayson was incorrigible.

"Any time you two care to run up to Graysaxe; my cottage at Cliffside-on-the-Hudson,—I'll tell you where you'll find the key to get in with!"

. . . . . .

Grayson's proffer caught root in me. If Beryl would have me, why not?

Through our summer's continued correspondence about flowers, I guessed she must feel something for me.

. . . . . .

The next day Beryl and I lunched at Renganeschi's, and, over the second bottle of wine, I suggested a walk in the country . . bringing in Grayson's house in casual fashion—"a retreat in case of rain."

There too, before an open fire, after the walk, we might enjoy a camper's supper. And any time during the evening we might return to the City. A train, New York bound, stopped at the local station every hour—day or night.

And there were limitless fields we could walk in, up there, even though it would be a bit late for flowers growing. But I was sure there would still be goldenrod, and, here and there, a tree shifting into many-colored autumn gorgeousness.

Beryl looked across brightly from under her floppy picture hat.

"I'll go, if you'll promise to behave!"

"Of course I'll promise to behave!

"Will you excuse me a moment? I've got to telephone."

Frank answered. He had sagely given me his telephone number for just such an emergency.

"You're not letting any grass grow under your feet."

I would find the key to the front door, under the first step that led up to the porch—right hand side, facing the house.

. . . . . .

The name "Graysaxe" was made up of the first syllable of Grayson's name, combined with the last name of Minnie Saxe, his sweetheart.

Graysaxe—it stood high on an embellished square board nailed against a pilled sapling. . .

"Johnny, let me down please!"

I had carried Beryl up to the top, from the sheer foot of the winding ascent that Frank Grayson had beautifully and skillfully engineered in spirals.

Wreathing higher and higher, the path looked like a Doré etching of the building of the tower of Babel.

I was not at all averse to letting Beryl down, though I held her on in my arms, to impress her and indicate my strength.

For the progress upward had been toilsomely perpendicular.

As if the effort were nothing, still I held her high, starting up the lesser slope toward the porch.

"I think I've earned a kiss!"

"No, you haven't," she kicked till I let her down.

"I might let you kiss me, once or twice, later on . . but you'll have to wait till we do something else first!"

. . . . . .

There WAS goldenrod. The fields were multitudinously bright with it.

We gathered armsful of it. She insisted on my weighing her down. She looked, beneath the burden, more childlike than ever.

She let me give her the slightest kiss, once. But when I put my arms down about her, she pushed up the heap of dusty goldenrod, and set me choking.

. . . . . .

In each of the two bedrooms she came upon tin pitchers that had been painted green. She set one on each side of the hearth, filled with goldenrod.

"Go down the hill to the grocery store we passed on the way up, and bring some eggs: they're easiest to cook. . ."

When I had climbed back, carrying the paper bag of eggs, she

was already busied about: she had found a pair of blue denim overalls that buttoned over the shoulders with straps . . wide and loose . . she had drawn on the overalls to save her dress. They were rolled in folds hugely over the tops of her high-heeled shoes. She was minikin-absurd in them, especially since, her jacket off,—in her shirtwaist she showed the pushing breasts of the fully developed woman.

"We'll boil them"; she brought her fingers out of the bag, dripping yellow.

"You've broken a couple."

I explained that I had stumbled on the way up, forgetfully looking out over the great purple valley that lay, like a vast bowl, below. . .

"That's a pretty good sign you won't be married, this year!"

. . . . . .

"The moon's up!"

I should not have said that. We had been sitting in front of the open fire, dreaming. At my words she disengaged her hand from mine that clasped it. . .

She said:

"Let's go out into the moonlight for a while, before we go back to the City!"

"All right!"—for now I saw possibilities in the moon, and was glad I had broken the spell of our pulse beating together, in our interwoven fingers. . .

. . . . . .

It was a great, full moon. We had all the semblance of walking straight into it, stepping down from the porch. It poured floods of silver. The very night became nocturnal day. The Hudson wound below, bright in its wide gleam. The distant intervolving hills stood out, apparent, not with quite a daylight appearance, though distinct,—but strange and portentous, as if their leaves and branches had been hammered out of some kind of bright, solid metal.

We seated ourselves close together on the verge of the jutting bank of earth between two trees, imminent over the valley.

The moon gleamed so brightly that I fancied any one might observe us there.

Beryl spontaneously curved her small body into mine.

We sat still as stocks, enraptured with the glory of the night.

I sought her mouth without a word, and she gave her mouth to me with the soft crush and taste of fruit warm from the ripening sun . . I clasped my hand over one of her breasts and held it close . . slowly her arms crept up over my shoulders. . .

Good God, if I had only held my tongue! . . the moon and her woman's natural instincts might have prevailed and I would have found a mate.

But, no—I must talk. . !

I must ask her for what was already mine, if I had had sense——

"Beryl!" I murmured.

Instantly one of her arms slid away, limp.

Irritably her eyes came open.

"What is it? what do you want?"

"You! . ."

"No!"

Now I must go on, having seen my mistake, make the best of it!

"Give yourself to me!"

She stiffened against me, her daylight caution prodded awake by the sound of speech. . .

"You fool! . . just like a poet! . . what did you talk for? now you've broken the spell. . ."

Yes—fool—I had broken the spell. . .

But——

I would take her, nevertheless!

. . . . . .

Small women! I had seen that they could bear big babies—but I had never realized how strong they could be! . .

Nevertheless, my strength was prevailing . . neither of us spoke . . both of us, panting, waiting a while, struggling anew . . my eyes went dark . . the generations of the sensual beast that would hardly be gainsaid—woke in me! . .

Time and again I tore her fragile hands from my throat. There was no more struggle left in her. . .

It was she who spoke now, breaking the primitive spell I was under——

"Johnny,—do you think it's being a DECENT RADICAL!—TO BEHAVE THIS WAY—A TRUE FEMINIST——?

"IT'S—IT'S JUST WHAT ANY DIRTY BOURGEOIS MAN WOULD DO!"

That gave me pause:

"Beryl, don't you really want me? isn't all this fight you've put up, sham?" I asked, still holding her captive. . .

"No! No! Good God, no!

"Please—please let me go,—I mean it!"

"All right! Come on, we'll go back to the house!"

"Please don't touch me any more!"

"Don't be a fool—I'm only helping you to your feet!"

I lifted her up from the torn sod and the bent and broken twigs.

"You devil!" she was seeing the humor of it—"it looks like a battleground!"

The great moon walked back to the house with us.

. . . . . .

No one but Frank Grayson ever had an inkling of our trip. But Grayson had to have his jesting fling at me. . .

"Hope you had a good time, up at Graysaxe."

"Don't be a boob, Frank, we just picked flowers."

"In the autumn?"

"We picked goldenrod . . we took a long walk . . I quoted poetry to her in the moonlight . . then we came back to town."

He laughed again.

"—quoted poetry?—at the wrong moment?—you're the one that's the boob!"

A genial slap on the back from him——

"You nut,—don't you know that, if you only keep your mouth shut, at certain times, women'll let you get away with—anything?

"But—better luck next time,—and any day you care to run out to Graysaxe, whether to take any one there,—or to go alone and write . . why, you know where I hide the key. . . !

"Only—let me know first, so's no one else'll be in your way. . .

"But you'll always be welcome when Minnie and I are up there!"

. . . . . .

Beryl and I remained friends, but we did not see each other, very often, after the foregoing episode.

. . . . . .

Janice observed that, during the summer, I had considerably improved in physique. . .

"I ought to improve; I never miss a day's exercise."

"I couldn't exercise, unless I had a band playing for me."

"I have a band, playing for me, inside, all the time," I returned.

Despite her once flagrantly betraying my confidence—a false confidence which I shall detail to you later—I liked particularizing to Janice every little thing about myself—each obscure peccadillo.

I confessed, then, that when in the dumps, I had the habit of imagining I was marching along to the strain of "The Marseillaise" playing inside me. I went in proud step to that interior music and melody, so walking my temporary depression down. . .

Or—I confessed—I would repeat over and over the foolish catch-word: "I'm worth a million dollars!" "I'm—worth—a million—dollars——" while I walked along,—with frequently not a nickel in my pocket, *this* shibboleth, *that* music—would buoy my spirit up!

. . . . . .

While I was discussing my exercise and my physical condition, I proudly exhibited my open mouth with two teeth broken off short . . out there in the woods the teeth had ached and ached from holes in them. One day I had come to the end of my patience with the dull, continual throb of pain, and had pried them out with a screw driver. . .

"You ought to have heard them pop!"

"You barbarian!" Janice was delightedly disgusted,—"why didn't you see a dentist?"

"—Didn't have the price—dentists charge a lot, don't they?"

Affectionate compassion shone from her eyes—"you poor dear,—you might have come to town and gone to my dentist—if you had only let me know!

"I would have had him put it on my bill!

"You're quite uncivilized!"

"The dentist would have hurt me!"

"You big baby, didn't you hurt yourself more?"

"Sometimes I'm such an awful coward—and at least I didn't have to sit still in an upholstered chair while another fellow hurt me, where I couldn't hit back!"

"You'll surely rue breaking off those teeth at the stumps!

"When you reach middle age you'll need all your teeth . . ab-

scesses. . . Won't you go to my dentist to have the stumps treated?"

"No,—Janice,—I won't!"

"You poor fool!" she said, not harshly, but pitying—"you need a keeper,—that's what *you* need!"

. . . . . .

A pair of books flung, random and slack, against my legs, and just hard enough to hurt. . .

I was sitting, Buddhistically cross-legged on the floor, in front of Janice's book shelves:

" '—something splendid and new in poetry'?—'something to come over you like your discovery of Keats,' when you—'were sixteen'? . .

"There you have it—if you've never read them before, as you say you have not——

"The Collected Poems of Francis Thompson, in two volumes."

Those were the books she had flung at me, hurting my leg——

"Help yourself to breakfast—to whatever you can find in the icebox—then stay here as long as you like, and read those poems——

" 'Billy's' gone off to Rochester, to visit her folks—I'll leave you here to your own devices!"

. . . . . .

All the glory and beauty and wonder that men had ever sought, believed in, hoped for, I discovered in those books—distilled through the fine alembic of a great poet's mind. . .

Food? I had no need of it.

The noon whistles blew.

Excited, feverish, I read and read, taking all postures and attitudes of comfort and discomfort.

Dusk seemed to have jumped in at the window at one leap.

The latch clicked and Janice strode in with her quick, slinging gait.

"What, you still here?"

She glanced at the table: "And you haven't had a bit to eat?"

"All day I've been a disembodied spirit."

"Come back to earth . . we're going over to Daddy Trotter's for dinner."

"Let me read you the 'Corymbus to Autumn' first."

"So you think Francis Thompson a great poet—greater than you?" she stressed ironically.

" 'Greater than I?' don't blaspheme him!"

"When I find you in a mood like this, Gregory, I'm rather in love with you." She rendered me a social kiss and led me off to dine, saying, on the way, that George Moore was a liar,—he daring to make the statement somewhere in his writings, that, since Dante, The Catholic Faith had not produced any great work of literary merit, nor any great poet.

. . . . . .

A rousing evening at Trotter's. One of those felicitous forgatherings that happen, and that no amount of previous arranging could have brought about.

"When everybody just strolled in, by preordination."

Vandyke-bearded, our slim, jovially acute Italianate, Junius Alverson was there, like some one fresh from Boccaccio's garden party . . Vera Williams, the magazine writer, accompanying him, not his wife. The latter was gradually slipping away from the group. She was angry at Janice . . asserting that the latter held "a pernicious influence toward looseness and disintegration" over her husband. . .

Once, at one of Janice's parties,—the last one that she attended—Mary Alverson had drawn moodily apart, and, feeling sorry for her, I had strolled over to her, to engage her in conversation.

"What's the matter, Mary?" I asked, in a low voice, while the general conversation rolled about the group. . .

She leaned toward me, pronouncing with a vehemence that startled me——

"I hate this Janice Godman! God, how I hate her!

"She's taking Junius away from me, not for herself, but to hand him over to another woman!"

She was a large-bodied yet well-shapen woman . . her clothes always seemed as if husking off her . . one expected that at any moment, an extra twist, and she would step out of them, all gleaming white.

"—the looseness and disintegration of a great, white rose"—I stepped aside to write the phrase down for remembrance.

Then I slipped across the room, while some one else engaged her in conversation,—to show Janice my simile descriptive of Alverson's wife.

. . . . . .

That night, at Trotter's: Minnie Saxe was there also, and her sweetheart, Frank Grayson; Jessie Cummins and her sweetheart, big, slack Jim Benders; and stocky, rosy-faced Harry Parnell, like an Eros dressed in modern clothes; and, the last to join us, Lilla Matthewson and Jack Matthewson. . .

Our animation owed little to the wine bottle; it seldom did; oftener our interest came from a common sharing of knowledge of books and art and what was happening in the contemporary life around us. . .

. . . . . .

Whenever we gathered in his restaurant, Daddy Trotter hovered on the edge of our flamboyant group like a proud but disquieted father.

Sometimes his children were too wild, he thought,—but he defended them:

"These are my boys and girls, that's what they are! And I stand by them, through thick and thin, sir! By George, sir, I do!

"They say wild things sometimes, I grant that, but they don't ever do harm to anybody . . they're good, gentle people 'way down in their hearts. . .

"Listen to them, and you'd think they were planning to blow the world up,—but, Lord, they don't mean a tenth of what they say!" . .

. . . . . .

"If Daddy Trotter only realized that we mean what we say, every word of it, when we're serious, I bet he'd throw a fit! . . but he refuses to believe it—as a part of his protective mechanism."

"He certainly keeps his protective mechanism working overtime."

"He'd drop dead if he thought we really meant some things he's sure we don't."

"Drop dead? The old cavalier would throw us out bodily,—that would be more like him!"

"God love him," exclaimed Junius fondly, "he gets the biggest kick of his life out of us."

. . . . . .

When we had first come in, the evening I refer to, Trotter was red-faced to the verge of apoplexy, and those few sparse hairs of sickly white on the top of his head seemed to kink and bend and unbend with rage.

But it didn't alarm us. "Willyum" his big black cook, and he, had only had another of their hectic disagreements.

Our affectionate jollying soon smoothed Trotter down.

"Willyum's become mighty bigoted since he's gone uptown and got in with them Harlem niggers. . ."

"I brought him up from a boy, down in Georgia . . but I cain't handle him now . . that nigger ain't got no gratitude!"

. . . . . .

But this last squabble between Trotter and his cook had assumed proportions more serious. . .

Willyum, wielding the sharpening steel for kitchen knives, had gone at his boss; and Trotter, retreating a few steps, had defensively snatched up a cleaver that lay at hand on a block, and had run his big black cook out to the sidewalk . . where, with an oath, the latter had defiantly hurtled the sharpening steel back through the shattering window pane—as last gesture of quitting Daddy Trotter forever . . shouting loud, so that three blocks could hear it, in great, rich negro tones, that, this time, he was *through*, forever!

"It's getting so it isn't fun anymore," observed Clara, the buxom, short Scotch waitress to me privately. . .

"Bût where's Willyum now?" asked Janice, pleasantly skeptical of Trotter's continuing wrath as well as of the big cook's prolonged absence. . .

"Where he ought to be!" returned Trotter fiercely—"in the lock-up at Jefferson Market: where I ought to of put him long ago."

But Trotter's furious declaration had an unconvincing air. . .

And we were not surprised that, next morning, in police court, Trotter had, begging off a sentence, paid the fine out of his own pocket. . .

Soon Willyum Jones was busily about again, his face shining like the bottom of a scoured pan. . .

Jones was himself a unique character. His enunciation of English was good.

He spent all his spare time reading the old-fashioned writers: Scott, Thackeray, Dickens—he was, especially, a Bulwer Lytton fan.

From these writers he had derived a formal, long-winded manner

of speech—which I cannot begin to reproduce. It would sound incredible.

Whenever any of our crowd chanced to be in the restaurant, Willyum would often saunter forth, up from the cellar kitchen, on some pretext or other . . our voices floating high in argument, drawing him.

Loitering about and listening to our discussions his face would assume a beatifically gloating expression . . he held a reverence and worship for writers that was the idolatry of a talented savage. . .

"My literary nigger," Trotter called him.

. . . . . .

Trotter preserved constant gentleness to but one creature—an old mongrel dog, unimaginatively named "Prince" . . he'd say over and over again that Prince was his one real friend . . "ain't that right, Prince!" and Prince, lying always by the cashier's desk would thump-thump his tail in vigorous affirmation.

"See, Johnny!—he's just shouting *yes* with his tail! don't tell me dogs don't understand everything."

. . . . . .

As I have intimated, we were not serious every minute . . we often found keen, intellectual pleasure in using ideas as playthings.

But it was Minnie Saxe who was most ingenuous and serious. She would rush, sometimes, in actual bodily resentment against some declaration seeming to her outrageous . . rising from her chair or leaning ardently forward, breathing quick personal indignation—"nearly coming out of herself at us. . ."

As she did, once, when we teasingly advocated the abandonment of sickly or superfluous children, after the custom of the modern Chinese and ancient Spartans:

Up Minnie beat wildly, flaming against us all, turning on me, the nearest, and threshing her hands against my breast in a fluttering, agonized manner; then seeing the fun in our faces, she sank back into her chair, subsiding in quick, breathless gasps.

Grayson himself, Minnie's man, enjoyed teasing her as much as we,—his eyes glistening large with merriment behind his glasses.

"I think you're all frightful!" she cried, quivering indignantly.

Thwacking her on the back, Frank:

"Don't be a hypocrite, Minnie! you know there's nothing you like

better than being given the chance to be indignant! It's your greatest pleasure!"

. . . . . .

But Harry Parnell, our stocky, pink Cupid, knew how to tent Grayson to the raw, where he was touchiest.

"Frank, when are you going to invite me out to 'Graysocks' "—deliberately travestying the name of Grayson's place at Cliffside-on-the-Hudson. . .

Grayson stiffens with genuine, though but momentary anger . . and now we have the hearty laugh on him. . .

'Graysaxe' was his chief point of pride, was his deep retreat from all the world's fret and annoyance, and he could not bear to hear it spoken of slightingly . . or have its name travestied.

. . . . . .

"Out of us women will come a great generation of young, free women," predicted Janice—"free, young women wearing skirts to their knees, or, more likely, knickerbockers, like "Billy," my protégée.

"We," she continued, "have gone pretty far, discarding corsets, and wearing loose clothing. . ."

"And the trouble of having long, thick hair—that brings headache by its heat and weight, in summer—they'll universally do away with that, as we've already done."

"Yes, they laugh at us now—blackguard us, even," (writers in the popular magazines, and newspaper men, were hard at it, setting up "the bobbed haired woman" as a sinister depraved figure)—"but the day will come when all women will wear their hair short"—a little sadly—"not because it's the comfortable thing to do, but because it's the fashion."

Vera Williams roused herself from her absorption in Junius Alverson to protest (she kept her hair long) that it would never be the fashion, we could be sure of that. . . !

Janice Godman proceeded where she'd left off—"and doing anything because it's the fashion, 'the thing to do'—is the most immoral act I can conceive."

"You'd do it because it was NOT the thing," I pronounced unfairly, to get a rise out of her. . .

"Nonsense, women will never show their legs in public!" protested Vera again, belatedly returning to the debate, withdrawing her fond

eyes once more from Junius; but the heat with which she delivered her opinion drew our understanding laughter upon her.

"Vera takes everything personally!" observed Janice wickedly, sipping her coffee.

We all knew Vera's legs had a slight bow to them.

"Janice, sometimes you go too far!" stuttered Junius Alverson indignantly.

This was the last touch. It sent us into a rollicking gale.

People stopped outside looking in through the windows to see what the fun might be.

. . . . . .

My present ambition was to keep on adding to the giant growth of "The Family"—my epic-satire against marriage and the family . . I was filled with a vision of myself famous like Shelley—of my book's becoming the Radical Bible. . .

Whenever I could I pushed all other composition of verse aside.

Consequently, I was kept pretty much on an edge more ragged than usual . . ringing the bells of friends' flats, catching them in before they left for their day's work—bumming a quarter, half dollar, or dollar, for food (for I had spells when I was reluctant to charge further at Trotter's).

. . . . . .

"Minnie, have you a bit of loose change—an extra fifty cent piece? Give it to Johnny, if you have."

Minnie Saxe fished down into her purse of silver network, and reached me forth the fifty cents I had come to borrow. . .

Frank Grayson, while asking her to lend me the money, was wandering robustly through the flat, dressed in nothing but his spectacles.

On the breakfast table stood a large cut glass bowl, spilling different kinds of fruit like a cornucopia. In the kitchen the percolator was sput-sputting, sending forth a pleasant aroma of coffee. On two plates stood saucers of breakfast food, golden-rich with abundant, swimming cream.

"Johnny, sit down and eat breakfast with us; save that fifty cents for lunch or dinner," called Grayson, from his bedroom, dressing for the day. . .

"Yes, Johnny,—do!" Minnie—heartily confirming Frank Grayson's invitation. . .

At breakfast, most of our conversation came in Rabelaisian bursts, interrupted from time to time by indignant protests from Minnie. . .

Then Frank, swinging his shoulders, sauntered off to his office, leaving me alone there with Minnie, who did not have to go to her work as corresponding secretary of The Women's Betterment League, till ten. . .

"Johnny, I've long had something I've wanted to remonstrate against, as regards your behavior . . I couldn't speak about it while Frank was here, because he'd pooh-pooh the danger you are in, and urge you to keep on."

"What have I done that I shouldn't have done, Minnie?" I was puzzled.

"You just mustn't keep on replying to women who write you for advice, informing them of the facts of 'Birth-Control'—the Government will find out sooner or later, and you'll finish up with a stiff jail sentence, if you don't watch out!"

I smiled gravely, I promised to give heed to Minnie's request and warning . . though I confess, I had not at all been doing what she had advised me against.

Janice had passed the tale around, as I had known she would, after I had falsely boasted to her when discussing neo-Malthusianism, that I was doing so, in a moment of desire to reap false glory. . .

. . . . . .

I had also put another false boast before Janice:

I had boasted that I had been intimate with Mrs. Vintoun . . and despised myself for having made the boast, the minute after . . it had just tripped off my tongue.

My lie was evoked innocently enough!

That night of her first party that I attended we were arguing as to whether an author did or did not put his own personal experience into the books that he wrote——

Janice maintained that every incident in every novel, was but a transmogrified bit of the author's actual life. . .

She and I had had this discussion before, alone together . . and, to confirm her contention, I had brought forward De Maupas-

sant's "Morroca" where the lover, hiding under the husband's bed, can hardly keep himself from reaching out and touching the husband's feet. . .

"De Maupassant must have had that experience because I felt the same obsession . . to reach out at her husband's feet . . the time I had to hide under Mrs. Vintoun's bed."

Immediately I swore Janice to secrecy.

But she brought it up before the party, as an illustration of the value of "Creative Gossip" about contemporaries.

But I left out our conversation at Minnie and Frank's breakfast table, that morning: I shall indicate it here, for the bearing it has on our personalities:

. . . . . .

"Have some bran with your breakfast food . . it'll do you good, Johnny,—your bowels——" and Grayson's eyes showed a forerunning glint of some Rabelaisian crack——

"Now, Frank!" Minnie warned.

But Frank made his unprintable remark, and I retorted jocularly, in kind.

Minnie, quick-breathing with indignation, fetched us each a sound smack on the ear . . which we had been angling for.

"Both of you ought to have your mouths scrubbed out with soap."

As clean as a new cake of Ivory Soap was Minnie in her person. She breathed an aroma of washed and scrubbed daintiness. Yet somehow vulgarity and coarse expressions violently attracted her—and repelled her with the same violence.

She maintained that any joke that had a point of real humor was legitimate. But we could never find out her criterion of what was legitimate.

Often she could not see the point of a joke that was obvious to us, and would set us off into hearty laughter. . .

"There's some jokes women can't ever get . . as obvious to men as the Jefferson Market Clock."—Frank.

"—That never keeps right time!" scored Minnie quickly.

. . . . . .

But we are still at breakfast:

Minnie sat there in her brown, sacklike dress-reform gown . . her hair having a silver color to it not of age, swinging bobbed, like a

Dutch child's . . her plump, rosy face aglow; animated and pretty.

Minnie had a trick of swaying her body from the hips, to and fro, then back and forth, gently, rhythmically, while she ate. She did this, she avowed, "to help on the peristaltic action of digestion."

At the mention of "digestion," Frank's eyes caught their humorous glint again, but, anticipating what was coming, Minnie stopped him by emitting a genuinely disconcerted cry:

"Stop!!! Nubbins!!!"

The fun he derived—and I—from her facial indignation—her flushed cheeks and eager, round eyes that almost panted with their strange, spattered pupils,—was sufficient, supplying the place of the interrupted joke. . .

. . . . . .

After Minnie had exacted my promise that I would no longer disseminate knowledge of birth-control, thereby jeopardizing my freedom——

"Johnny, wait a minute—I'd like—would you please, before you go, explain the point to that story about the burglars breaking into the butcher shop—and—and what they got there?"

"But Frank explained it—all they got was sheep's——"

Standing close to me, though she had incited me to the retailing of Frank's story, she clapped her hand over my mouth——

"It's not necessary to repeat the word . . but I'm just as much in the dark as before . . I can't bring myself to see what humor there can possibly be in a never named portion of sheep's anatomy.

"You know, sometimes I think you men can be incredibly stupid and filthy."

. . . . . .

After reciting obscene jokes, with me that would not be the end of it.

I felt that a man who considers himself a great poet, oughtn't to talk that way, but under the momentary urge, I could not keep from it.

Yet in the deep midnight, as I lay in my bed alone, bad attacks of conscience would come upon me—not of moral conscience, but of a conscience involving the æsthetics of the thing——

"If you're going to keep this behavior up, you might as well go back to the boxcar and keep on being a bum——

"If it were only your real self that you were expressing, but it isn't"—I would groan.

. . . . . .

Daddy Trotter ran into me accidently, on Sixth Avenue. . .

"Where've you been keeping yourself, boy,—these last two weeks?"

I answered evasively.

"You mustn't neglect Daddy Trotter's."

It wouldn't matter how much I hung him up—he reiterated that he was positive some day I would be famous and a success, and I could pay up then.

He was brimful of an idea, to him startling and novel. He had commissioned a poor young artist to paint him a sign to swing on the wind in front of his restaurant:

"My coat of arms, you know, in a sort-of-way . . it will be the painting of a horse, trotting—because, you see—my name!"

He was childishly eager to learn what I thought of it, was delighted beyond bounds when I replied that I thought it would be simple and effective, possessing at least two of the qualities found in all great art.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Nough was another of the folks I found it hard to face when I fell behind financially . . Mrs. Nough, who like Daddy Trotter, behaved quite leniently toward me. . .

. . . . . .

One of the three or four editors of magazines whom I had broken in to buying my verses the same day they were submitted, was Charley Maitland. . .

I had known him for several years . . had first met him at a party where, a robust, threshing bucko belying his middle age by his youthful appearance, he stood in the midst of a half dozen stunningly pretty girls he had fetched to the party himself . . all girls who wrote for "Maitland's Magazine" or who drew exciting covers and illustrations for it—portraying young women in various postures of lingeried undress that revealed, rather than concealed, their nudity—by limitless suggestion of extremely limited apparel. . .

. . . . . .

Every so often Maitland's aristocratic, gentle-born mother de-

scended upon him in his New York office, and each time, legend was, she persuaded her son that the stories he printed were not staid and moral enough. . .

Then, for several issues, Maitland, like a sheepish boy, would print stories less risqué, informing his writers that all their future stories must be moral. . .

But, since the very life and circulation of "Maitland's" depended on its continued "spice," "sparkle," and "daring," Maitland, despite his love and reverence for his mother, was forced to return to his standard editorial policy. . .

. . . . . .

Charley Maitland had sent for me:

"I'm about to start a new magazine "Dizzy Stories,"—and I wanted to talk with you about some verse—I can use any amount of light, snappy rhymes—the lighter and snappier the better . . you must have a big bunch of junk you've never been able to dispose of——"

"I have," I responded, attempting slight, dignified rebuke by my tone—"Have lots of POETRY,—love-poetry, the bottom of my trunk packed full of it . . unconventional stuff . . all written in the best classical manner, though . . verse good enough for the BIG magazines——" (BIG a dig at him in retaliation)—"only it deals too genuinely, I'm afraid, with the real passions of men and women, and——"

"Oh, I don't give a damn how GOOD it is if it only has snap and speed in it."

My dominant impulse was to fly into a huff and stalk out, my poetic dignity insulted . . but my pockets hadn't a cent in them. . .

Instead:—

"Charley,—I've a lyric in my head right now—that I'll write out and sell you."

"No, you won't either. I'm too busy. I was just passing on the idea to you . . now run home and dig out a dozen or so of your rhymes . . and bring them in, toward the end of the week."

"Charley, I've got to have a check right away."

"Broke?"

"I am."

"All right, sit down, and write out your poem."

I turned to the large table nearby, while he dove into his littered desk.

"Don't go weeping after me, dear, when I am dead,—
Put a flower in your hair, love again, instead——"

Right there Maitland wheeled his swivel chair about on me:

The jocular glint in his eye had faded, it had been replaced by a severe business look. . .

"By the way, a quarter a line is all I'm paying."

I was about to demurr, then I bethought me of a way to circumvent him, and went on . . copying out the first two couplets into a quatrain, and turning the last two into quatrains—handing it to him, it was spaced thus:

"Don't go weeping over me,
Dear, when I am dead,—
Put a flower in your hair,
Love again, instead:

Say that I should go to heaven—
Are not angels fair?
Is not hell notorious
For the beauties there?"

Accepting the quarter a line, I walked out with two dollars instead of the one he would have given me. . .

The next afternoon I sold him ten more poems, the lines of which, I also broke up into smaller metric units. . .

Thus I made him pay me fifty cents a line in spite of himself.

. . . . . .

"Thanks, Gregory, I knew we could do business together. This is exactly the kind of stuff I'm looking for. . .

"Now, to show I'm willing to help,—you write me a mass of this stuff, and I'll slip three or four in, each issue, under different names . . it wouldn't look right, repeating 'John Gregory'. . .

"According to your simpler standards, that ought to give you enough to live on . . for I'm intending to bring out two issues of "Dizzy Stories" a month, and, later on, to turn it into a weekly. . ."

Observing me hesitate, he urged:

"Go ahead. You can put your best one under your own name each time. It won't hurt. No one else need know what you're doing. I won't tell!"

"—Charley, I want you to understand from the first, that it's only their subject-matter that keeps these poems of mine out of the big magazines.

"We're still caught in the back-wash of the dreary, sexless Mid-Victorian Era.

"I wonder how much longer editors who imagine God in Church-of-England creased trousers and a top hat on,—are going to decide what literary mode is proper in poetry?

"Catullus, Anacreon, Sappho, Tibullus, Heine, Prior,—" I recited at random—"if they wrote to-day, it wouldn't be the big magazines that bought their poetry—"

I felt momentarily well-disposed toward Maitland because he had bought so much of my work:

"I'd have them all writing for me!" He sat back, proud.

I could not put by the chance to score. . .

"Yes, Charley? at a quarter a line."

"Sure!" he answered, serious, impenetrable to the barb, assuming a look of satisfaction.

. . . . . .

"The poems of Stanley Barron—silver birches half-definable in a shadowy evening twilight,—their still ghostliness reflected in a hushed lake——

"Outside of him there are only two other poets in America of equal promise, George Sterling and young Quadreck, who wrote 'The House of Sin'."

And Galusha Siddon responded:

"Since you speak of Barron, he's in Lephil's office right now:

"He's said nice things about your verse, too. I'd like you to have a talk with him. It might do you good."

. . . . . .

The Strollers' Club on Gramercy Square . . a quiet shaded club that induced refined, lowered voices, (why must voices be lowered to be refined?) . . there were fine, big, sinky, leather chairs there that accepted one's sitting body comfortably . . all the magazines lined a large center table. . .

While affecting scornful indifference, I was envious of those who enjoyed the quiet luxury of the place; I eagerly drank in its cachet of literary and artistic well-being.

I was having lunch there, at Stanley Barron's invitation.

To me Barron appeared at the top of æsthetic and aristocratic leisure.

While he discoursed of the salons of London and Paris I related adventures of vagrant life, discoursed of boxcars, jails, hobo adventures, and hobo "jungles" on the outskirts of middle-western towns. . .

"Somehow," frankly complained Barron, "I never seem quite to *get* at life, to put my hands on the solid warmth of it. Something seems to drop a veil between me and the true stuff of it . . thin, ever so thin, that veil is,—but totally impenetrable."

I was about to assure him that, as he felt, so—I, and every other being of any artistic sensitivity felt—was forever haunted by just such an untrue sense of his frustrate ineffectiveness——

But I withheld this sane and just interchange of thought——

Instead, vociferously and strenuously I fell into condemnation of his leisurely mode of existence.

And, the hollower my conviction, the noisier lifted my voice. . .

He had confessed to me that he enjoyed a fair income. . .

People at adjoining tables glanced in my direction, obscurely irritated at my girding tones.

"It would be better for you to be on the bum, like me—better for your work, Stanley Barron!"

"I certainly envy you the free, adventurous life you've lived," said Barron.

I was not honest enough to admit to him, equally, that I envied him his sure surroundings and economic certainties . . as much as he envied me my care-free life.

I do not see how I succeeded in giving him and others the effect and impression of rough candor and utter honesty.

. . . . . .

"And where are ye off to so fast?" asked Pat Corrigan, squinting one eye at me.

He was standing ornately in front of his saloon, his huge silver

watch-chain and pendant seals of several secret orders dangling over the expansive front of his flowered vest.

"I've got a tea-date I'm on the way to."

"Ah, come in an' have a man's drink, first."

Inside in the large back room—"The Working Girls' Home"—Corrigan and I sat down on the outskirts of a multitude of disorderly tables not yet slewed back into position for the evening's cabaret.

"As I spied ye comin' along, it put me in mind, of how ye onct askt me what I knew about th' Ould Village . . an' now w'd be th' time fer me t' tell ye . . I'm feelin' like a good talk . . an' I have a few hours. . ."

I let him know I was having tea with Lilla Matthewson.

"An' does she still live up on East Fifteenth Street, off Broadway?"

I said she did.

" 'Faith that's the old house that used t' be a church . . wit' bits o' stained glass fer some of its windys yit. . .

"I know it well . . it was there that Josie Mansfield lived—old Jim Fiske's sweetheart. . .

"You don't know who Jim Fiske was? well, he was one o' th' first railroad builders—he also started Th' Fall River Line. . .

"Many's th' time, Johnny, I seen Jim Fiske an' his Josie Mansfield out drivin' up Sivinth Avenue—the swell place t' drive, them days!

"—Out drivin', bold as day, behint a spankin,' glossy pair o' horses, all stuck over, bright, wit' ribbons. . .

"Josie Mansfield herself, upright as a whip in its stock, sure of herself because she was a stunner fer looks. . !

"Jim beside her, bowin' right an' left t' his friends, like a king ridin' by—vainglorious because of Josie. . .

"He didn't only keep Josie there in that Fifteenth Street house—but he brought his cronies there, an' they gambled fer big stakes!

"Jim got his, though, on th' stairway o' th' Old Broadway Hotel . . he tumbled down the stairs, shot through the back by Stokes!"

The bartender stuck his head through the swinging door:

"Hye, boss,—'s a guy out here, askin' fer credit——"

"Right, Bill,—let's have a look at him."

Corrigan glanced covertly, over the top of the door:

"O.K. Bill!"

I had risen.

"Drop in again, Johnny, when you have more time on yer hands; and I'll tell ye lots o' queer things about life in th' Ould Village—when it WAS th' VILLAGE . . perhaps ye might make a book out of it!"

. . . . . .

The Matthewsons rented half the lower floor of the historic old house Corrigan knew. Their apartment consisted of one large, long room that ran the length of the house . . a gas range, two fireplaces, a sink with running water.

A great velvet curtain swung across the center of the room, dividing it into two equal parts, the rear for Jack, the front, for Lilla. . .

Lilla was all for the Medieval; there hung to one side, in her section of the large room, a long row of gorgeous gowns such as some Florentine noblewoman would gladly have worn, but not with any more distinction than Lilla Matthewson now wore one of them, caught about her supple loins by a depending rope, silken-tasselled.

"These are my handiwork," showing me her array of gowns, each made of some sumptuous-appearing material,—"this is what I do, after school."

Lilla taught in a Montessori school. . .

. . . . . .

In the back, near a high-arched window, stood a lectern, fronted by a tall-backed Twelfth Century chair . . where her husband wrote. . .

"Jack writes essays mainly . . sometimes, when he's home, I'll have him show you some of his work."

Her husband was at present spending several weeks out in their cabin in the Jersey Hills putting the final touches to a volume of essays he thought to find a publisher for . . "though a volume of essays would be a quiet seller."

. . . . . .

Lilla was noted as almost the sole member among the group who advocated dress-reform, who possessed any proper understanding of the æsthetics of dress . . the first thing I noted about her, this tall,

handsome rather than beautiful woman—was how well her clinging gown fitted her slim, elegant body.

Jack Matthewson possesed a slight effeminateness about his too-regular classic features,—but the effeminacy extended no further than his features.

Jack was a walking fashion-plate of what the well-dressed Bohemian of the male sex was popularly supposed to wear . . trousers and jackets of plum-colored velour . . a soft-collared silk shirt . . a flowing Roycroft tie . . there lurked a facund, whimsical priestliness about his smooth-shaven mouth.

Together, Lilla and Jack made a fine couple.

. . . . . .

"Lilla, thank God YOU don't go about wearing a mealsack and calling it dress-reform."

My eyes ran over her admiringly. . .

"Don't be unjust, Johnny,—you can't expect my comrades to achieve the complete ideal at once . . to have cast off stays . . to have won to clothes that give the body freedom of motion—that's a triumph in itself."

Nevertheless, my compliment had proven acceptable; a smile of gratification flittered across her beautiful face, flawless as a mask. . .

"Maybe you say all those nice words because I'm good-looking. . .

"—for, why be a hypocrite! I might as well admit I know I am!" she spoke in a bold, melodious voice. Her eyes, glancing directly into mine, shone with tiny, weird, greenish-yellow lustres, like chance gleams of a cat's eyes in the dark.

"No,—it isn't because you're—handsome—it's because you have taste . . one or two of your contemporary dress-reformers aren't such bad-lookers, either, yet they swamp any prepossessing appearances they might have, by the dowdiness of their gowns. . ."

All enthusiasm—"wait a minute!" she bade, slipping behind a screen . . a white, sinuous hand, and forearm gleaming bare, reached for a gown. . .

In a trice she stepped forth even more gloriously clad. . .

Flushed with happiness, she donned gown after gown, showing them off before me. . .

"These are *my* poems."

. . . . . .

A vigorous knock. Halton Mann, poetry editor of "The National" walked in.

"Hello, Hal,—just in time for tea."

"Make it strong! I need it . . Jesus, it's good to escape from that cubby-hole of mine in the editorial offices of 'The National'."

"Why, Halton,—thought you liked editing."

"Sure, I like editing,—but I don't like the old nannies that run 'The National' . . Lephil, Siddon, and the rest . . and every week it grows worse,—ever since they've begun running it with their noses close to the ground, to smell out the Hick taste of the country.

"Take even the poetry, for instance . . a field that was to have been left entirely to me. . .

"Recently they've run in several rhymes over my head, that would —well—make a dog sick."

"Amen!" I exclaimed heartily.

"What do you know about it?" Mann asked impetuously.

"Know about it? Wasn't I in Siddon's office the other day—when the old bird, coming down hard on his middle-western farmer drawl to emphasize his honest-to-God earnestness—showed me a rhyme about cowboys being bored in heaven—pleading with God to set them doing some task they'd been used to, on earth . . they being finally set to the job of riding comets and rounding up maverick stars—in place of 'setting' you know, for all eternity, on golden chairs, plucking harps 'all unhandily'."

"You've hit upon the most recent cause of my disgust with them. . ." Mann took up:

"When, referring to the same poem, I informed Siddon it looked to me like a direct steal from Kipling, he answered, it didn't matter much where and how 'the feller got the inspiration fer th' pome' because 'it was good, plain stuff, anyhow, and would appeal to the common folks'."

"But I thought Siddon was a university graduate?

"He knows better than to say 'pome' for 'poem', doesn't he? He must be faking that farmer dialect of his?"

"He graduated from his university out west, with honors," replied Mann—"at first he must have faked his Hick dialect. But I

don't believe he fakes it now. After long practice, he's got himself hitched up to the conviction that dropping your g's and pronouncing poem—'pome's' good democracy—rather Lincolnesque. . . !

"Now you can see why I'm becoming sick of working on 'The National'."

. . . . . .

In a copper kettle set over reddening coals water was steaming for tea.

While Mann and I squatted on the floor, on cushions, Lilla leaned along the couch, like a panther lying along the limb of a tree . . watching down at both of us . . Halton Mann powerful as a young bull; topping upward from slim loins to a torso broad as mine, but one he was born with—not, like mine, an artificial development acquired by years of assiduous exercise.

"Johnny," Lilla bade me, "reach over and hand me that kettle off the fire. The water's boiling. . ."

"Climb down from your limb and do it yourself!"—I was "jollying" her—"no wonder a certain European writer dubbed women 'the constipated sex'."

Furious, Lilla leaped up and swiftly snatched the kettle off the coals, while I had my hand almost on it. . .

"For heaven's sake, Lilla"—seeing the flush of displeasure in her cheek—"Don't get mad—I was only 'kidding'——"

"I don't stand for 'kidding' when it happens to involve a slur cast on women—by a radical man!"

"Lilla's quite right . . there's never anything filthier than the priest's jest at the expense of the faith he believes in!" cried Mann.

Back of Mann's pronouncement lurked an antagonism that soon bristled from the very air, between me and him . . brought into existence by the prime fact of our being two young males moved to preen and strut in rivalry in the presence of a desirable female. . .

Lilla sensed the situation, literally drinking it in through expanding nostrils; and her every word and supple gesture became provocative of contest between us. . .

I scarcely know how it started, but, after much conversation and debate increasingly combative between us,—Mann and I had shuffled to our feet, and were straining to throw each other.

To make room, Lilla gleefully hurried the table and couch back. She gathered herself up on the table, knees under chin,—watching us——

We went around and around . . chairs were knocked over backward, hurtling; rugs were scuffled into heaps; the tea tray clattered to the floor, amid fragments of broken cups and saucers. . .

But Lilla sat quiet but tense, not even protesting the breaking of her delicate china . . awaiting keenly the outcome of our tussle. . .

Halton surely had me . . he was pressing on to victory, laughing and red from exertion—when, at that juncture, I got the better of him by a stratagem. . .

With him it meant a friendly wrestling bout we were waging. So, when I affected rage by glaring at him, my mood astonished him so that he failed to anticipate the sudden rush I followed it up with, concentrating all my strength to his overthrowing. . .

But, in falling, he recovered enough from his surprise to execute a belated twist that brought the side of his forehead on the floor with a bang, instead of his sprawling on his back. . .

I leaped up and back, ready again. Here was where I would catch it. Mann was a powerful fellow; he must be thoroughly mad, in response to the anger I trickly faked . . slowly and in dignified silence, he rose to his feet . . as he wavered, uncertain what course to pursue, Lilla shot swiftly in between.

"No real fighting, boys; I don't care to have the house wrecked."

Mann smiled quietly, rubbing the big bump on his forehead, into which ashes had been ground that the wind of our flying feet had whisked out from the hearth. . .

"You won that fall, Gregory——

"—you boys shake hands and quit . . that's enough for the day. . .

"Hal, you got a terrible bump!

"Come over to the sink and let me wash the dirt that's been ground in."

"No, you shan't touch it . . I'm going to keep it that way till to-morrow—I'll wash around it. . .

"And when I come into the office of 'The National' in the morning, and the boys ask me where I got it,—I'll tell them—from wrestling with the celebrated poet, John Gregory!"

Halton left, grinning proudly.

. . . . . [•]

I was discomfited, uncertain what to think——

"Say, Lilla, was Halton Mann trying to make fun of me, when he said that?"

"Not a bit of it . . he's just a big kid the same as you . . and he's really proud of that bump, for the reason he mentioned."

She smiled maternally.

. . . . . .

"Do you mind if I sit by you?" asked Vera Williams. She looked the crowded tables over. It was in the midst of the noon rush at Trotter's. In all the restaurant there was but one chair vacant, the one opposite me, at one of the few small tables for two, huddled in corners.

With my foot I pushed out the chair opposite, for there was no going around to it. I was hedged in by diners.

"I'd be glad to have you sit down and have lunch, on me." I invited importantly, "I've just sold thirty dollars worth of poetry."

"We'll go Dutch—I insist."

She took the seat.

"There's peas on the bill of fare. . . I'm passionately fond of peas, if they're fresh . . you order them first, to see if they're canned."

Trotter was standing, near, by the cashier's desk.

"—better not let Daddy overhear . . he'd throw you out bodily for casting aspersions on his food."

Besides, I didn't wish peas, and she had her nerve, asking me to order them. . .

After a while——

"Johnny,—after each bite, dear!—you must lay your knife and fork, so!" and she illustrated, "—parallel, close by each other, on the side of your plate . . then pick them up again for the next bite!"

"—That so?" I responded stiffly, "they're readier at hand, the way I have them." The blade of my knife was propped up on one side of the plate, its handle resting on the tablecloth: the fork held a cognate position.

She impudently reached across to rectify their position.

"By God, no!" I grabbed her hands and hurt them, squeezing them punitively. She winced, and tears came into her eyes . . "but Johnny," she protested dolefully, "there are certain things people must not do."

. . . . . .

"There are, on the contrary," I expostulated, "certain points of etiquette that are mere absurd punctilios—like not cutting your salad, for instance.

"I don't make a noise when I eat—don't suck my soup, don't pick my teeth at table or in public—what else matters?"

. . . . . .

Vera Williams reached across with her fork—dipped it into something that I had ordered, in a side dish——

"That looks good! Let me taste."

I parried her fork away with mine. . .

"You talk about bad table manners—is it good manners to peck into another person's food?"

Again she reached across the table, this time patting my cheek placatingly, and forcing her eyes to sparkle by dint of effort within, like pressing an interior button—compelling vivacity into her looks.

I have observed, since, that most women on friendly terms with a man, will reach over into his side dishes to taste. . .

. . . . . .

Frank Grayson had invited me out to Graysaxe over the week-end. . .

Lending me his commuter's book—"try and look detached when you hand this to the conductor, or he might take it up."

Who should I find in the train but Vera Williams.

"Hullo!—you going to Graysaxe, too!" I asked.

"You look as if you'd jump off the train if I had said 'yes'," she replied.

"It's not quite as bad as that."

She moved her suitcase from the seat beside her.

"Sit down, so I won't have some man I don't know, sitting by me, and trying to flirt."

. . . . . .

"Is Minnie Saxe's grey hair natural, Vera?"

"Natural?—what do you mean, do you think any woman would dye——?"

"I mean is that the natural color of her hair, or has some shock——"

"Don't you know that it's her jealousy over Frank's affairs that's turned it grey?"

"But I thought they were good Radicals—that they'd agreed to live their lives as they desired?"

"How can a theory, even a valid theory—keep a woman from eating her heart out?"

"I'm sure HE doesn't mind as regards HER . . he's fine friends with at least one of the men who has been a sweetheart of hers . . Schrank, the Radical lawyer."

"Frank suffers, too, in his way," said Vera, "but it just happens that Frank's feeling for Minnie is one of fondness, while her feeling for him is a passionate love——"

"Why, then?"

"—Does she have other men? . . I'll tell you—it's in blind, sick, desperate retaliation—for the women *he* has . .

"That's why her hair's white, and she, still young——

"Though she spreads the legend that it's a peculiarity of the women of her family."

We sat in silence. . .

"Oh," took up Vera again, with a personal cry, bitter from the heart—"Oh, you don't know how it hurts to imagine—to visualize—somebody else in the intimate embrace of the one you love!!!"

"Don't I though!"

. . . . . .

A giant whistle grew upon the air, mounting and mounting in shattering waves of sound . . filling the countryside with its alarum . . an awful, shuddering noise of gigantic pursuit. . .

I jumped half out of my seat——

"What? . . in the name of God?"

"Sing Sing! some one escaped——"

"GOOD!"

. . . . . .

"—Civilization's rottenest trick—to punish lawbreakers not only by imprisonment but by years of enforced celibacy—and you know

what dark and frightful personal habits come out of that—perversions—drugs——"

"Only some obscene master-monk could have devised such a cruel system of punishment," she agreed; "but quite as bad is the State's barbarity practiced upon the innocent dependents of the criminal . . when the lawbreaker's in jail what happens to th family? the family that State and politicians make such a hypocritic hullabaloo about preserving—the family suffers, and often either depends on charity or starves. . .

"We're scarcely a step from the Oriental method of holding the members of a family criminally responsible for whatever crime an individual belonging to it—commits!"

"It amounts to as much—yet the prisoner receives pay—" I said.

"Yes—a few cents a day. . .

"And that's why I'm a member of The Prisoners' Amelioration League. . .

"We're organizing all the Radicals in the country to effect legislation that will compel the State to pay a reasonable wage to prisoners—to be remitted to outside dependents!"

"It ought to be easy to put such legislation through . . Labor——"

Vera Williams sighed wearily——

"Organized Labor stands as our greatest stumbling block . . the Unions. . . It would be competition directed against them, they say!"

. . . . . .

"Do you disapprove of their attempt to be free?" I asked.

We were speaking again of Minnie and Frank.

"I think it's magnificent," I proceeded, across Vera's silence, "even if it does bring premature grey to the hair."

"You're not joking?"

"Joking? about two fine people who dare experiment, who dare try to live as individuals? . .

"Jealousy! . . it's a fine thing to set one's heart against it, fight against such a barbarous passion, to uproot it. . .

"I'll go further than Wilde. . .

"In order to perpetrate an epigram, Wilde said that jealousy was bad manners, bad taste, or something of the sort. . .

"I say it's an attempt at spiritual murder of another's individuality—some day it will be entirely outlawed from humanity—regarded as the lowest form of indecency."

. . . . . .

Minnie had prepared some delicious yellow squash to go with the loin of roast pork.

"—Grown in our garden this year," Frank boasted proudly.

"—Our own potatoes, too!" added Minnie, just as proudly.

"It's easy to live, if people would only learn how."—Frank.

"Yes," mused Vera sadly, "if they'd only learn how! . . but they won't."

We smiled at the tone of her voice. She glanced about quickly, sweeping the three of us with her eyes. . .

"I know you folks think I'm a little—well, tailormade—in my ideas,"—to me, about to speak,—"don't protest, Johnny, didn't I overhear you, one evening, at Trotter's, apply that very epithet to me?"

I flamed to the ears, embarrassed,—I had said worse,—"dowdily tailored."

Not that I regretted having said it of her, but that I had not been careful enough not to let her overhear.

. . . . . .

After supper . . a full moon, high and magnificent . . beautiful as it had been the evening Beryl and I had spent there. . .

On the same prominence that overhung the same vast, moon-enamored valley, lay the four of us . . poised on the very pinnacle of a silver-suffused world . . four white-colored objects, enjoying a moon-bath together . . smoking occasional cigarettes . . discoursing. . .

A rug for each couple to lie on: one for Frank and Minnie; one for Vera and me. For in the tangled grass stuck up infrequent sticks and pebbles not comfortable when pressing up against the naked body.

And there was danger of the sharp, quick nip of the night-traveling, highly experimental ant.

. . . . . .

—Conscious of our dividual nudities? Not a whit, after the first five minutes.

Lying there, lifted up into the sky on a prong of luminous earth, we soon forgot we'd brought our bodies along. We could sense obscurely rather than in any distinctness, each other's forms. The lack of day removed us from each other. As we talked, we looked down upon the world as from the stars themselves.

. . . . . .

After a long while, the night air began to push with a frosty edge.

We rose leisurely and sauntered back to the house, trailing the rugs.

The rough bark feeling good in our arms, Frank and I bore in logs for the fireplace.

Then we sat on cushions in front of the fire.

We took turns reciting poems we knew.

Putting aside the fact that we sat unclothed, the primmest company ever brought together from the conventional world could not have held to conduct more meticulous.

Frank and Minnie decided to take a week's vacation, laying off from their jobs in the city. Vera Williams left early Monday morning. I stayed on, at Frank's invitation:

"I'm building a privy. If you care to stay, you might help me, handing me the tools; driving a few nails; giving me a lift now and then, with heavier pieces of timber"; when he noticed a shadow of reluctance pass over my face—"or you're invited to stay on, without helping; I can easily hire a boy from the village——"

"I'll help, under the condition that, whenever an inspiration for a poem comes to me, I can stop and write——"

"—If you don't let a beam fall down on my head——"

"—I wouldn't be *that* abrupt!"

. . . . . .

Frank teased me about Vera— "I think you might have made a little love to her, while she was here!"

"Vera's Junius's sweetheart . . concerning husbands,—I have no feeling . . but I respect the rights of sweethearts . . Radical lovers take a chance—husbands have the laws and the conventions on their side."

"You can't say they don't take a chance, too!—a BIG chance!" observed Frank.

"—yes, taking an essentially false oath, as they do, to love, honor, and obey, till death do them part."—Minnie.

"When, by the laws of nature, three years is the average duration of a sexual interest between two lovers."—myself.

. . . . . .

"These Hicks! when I was down in the village yesterday evening, already the yokels thought they knew me well enough to pass the time of day and attempt comments on the weather!" I complained.

"You oughtn't to mind that," Frank commented, "—talk about the weather serves as a community password . . it's the simplest method of reassuring your neighbors that you're O.K., a regular fellow; one of them."

I was in an offish mood.

"But, damn it,—I don't care to be considered one of them . . I'm NOT! My interests are not their interests. . .

"But if I must speak to strangers I pass just because they've seen me a couple of times, why can't I say what I think——

"Instead of saying—' 'morning, it's a nice day, ain't it? though it does 'pear like we might have a little rain afore evening.' " I mocked bitterly,—"why can't my greeting be: 'good morning, do you think Hamlet was sane or not?' or 'What do you think of Socrates on life after death?' or 'do you believe in homoiousianism or in homoousianism?'—or 'good morning, neighbor, do you believe in marriage?' —why can't we speak right out, of what's sitting next to the inmost thoughts of our hearts,—or, better,—not speak at all?"

"As for me," proclaimed Minnie ardently, swinging her body to and fro, at the breakfast table, where we were holding the discussion—"I confess I rather like meeting and greeting people, though it means I must talk about the weather and crops and personal ailments. . .

"At the best, it evinces one's friendly attitude, at the worst, it's a defensive measure that keeps one to oneself, without the necessity of being rude to others. . .

"You know Whitman says, 'Comrade, if I meet you and want to speak to you, why shouldn't I speak to you; and, if you want to speak to me, why shouldn't you speak to me?'—or words to that effect. . ."

Irritated beyond measure I cried——

"And I, John Gregory—say 'Stranger, if I meet you on the street and you want to speak to me—why the hell should you speak to me . . and why the hell should I speak to you?' . . Oh, these sloppy, insincere, cowardly compulsions of democracy—really founded on the fear that the other man, silent, might be thinking himself better than you are! . .

"Oh, these vile policemen of the mind!" I had worked myself up into torrential indignation and was heaping forth words. . .

"It's lucky you haven't a tendency to apoplexy," said Frank.

Minnie changed her rocking from side to side to rocking backward and forward—she chanted rhythmically——

"Yes, yes, Johnny! You feel that way to-day, but to-morrow you'll maintain just the opposite!"

. . . . . .

Except the roof, the privy was entirely built.

"Don't it look grand, though?" asked Frank ungrammatically. Frank, I had learned, deliberately flung bad grammar at us, both to get a rise out of us, and to maintain his contention that education, in the true sense of the word, was not all grammar, the correct use of words, and literary and verbal facility . . that it meant just as much for one's personal culture to know how to build bridges, open up pioneer countries, raise breeds of animals and new varieties of plants. . . . .

"Don't it look grand, Johnny? I can't see why a privy can't be built as beautifully and reverentially as a temple——

"Seems to me the Romans did have a goddess named Cloacina! . .

"I don't see why you can't write a dedicatory verse over the seats!" his eyes gleamed playful through his glasses. . .

"Come on! all together, heave-ho!" and we heaved up on a section of the roof, to set it in place, over our heads . . it consisted of several planks, nailed together, and fairly heavy.

"Look! here comes Minnie around the corner, in her overalls, from the garden . . let's throw a scare into her."

"Get out from under, quick! I can hold it by myself . . one end's up, resting.

"I'll pretend it's falling on me."

Minnie Saxe came running up, as I pretended just to have come,

both of us men seeming to struggle in vain to keep the heavy boards aloft.

"Hurry up, Minnie! Quick! Help! Help us!"

"Oh, my Nubbins! my Nubbins!"—naming Frank's pet name——

We waited till she was close, panting affrightedly; then lifted the roof easily into position, guffawing.

She beat at us, characteristically, with small, clenched palms,—that wild, spattered, terrorized look in her eyes.

Her hysterical attack on us pretty nearly brought the roof down on our heads, in fact.

. . . . . .

I inscribed the Rabelaisian rhyme on the wall inside. . . Frank and I held our tongues, letting Minnie discover it for herself.

Intercepting me on the way out, Minnie, with a determined, painful smile, handed me a pail of warm water, a scrubbing brush, and a cake of soap—"before you come back, just trouble yourself to clean off what you've written out there"

. . . . . .

Janice's protégée, Billy Saunders, was never without a pretty girl chum.

The handsome, strapping, assertive girl chose just such other girls for companions as a man would choose for a sweetheart.

I came upon Cora, her latest friend. Cora sat on the floor, in front of the bookshelves, in Janice's library . . the poetry shelves. . .

"—you're fond of poetry?" I asked.

"Quite!"

She tilted up a bud of a face coquettishly; her skin was blossomy-white, and fresh with the light and vitality of youth. Her winsome, young body was clad in a modified dress-reform gown of close-fitting, brownish corduroy. . .

She gave me a sense of Orchards in April, or of the just-ripeness of a plum, blue-misted.

"Help me up; my leg's cramped."

Instead of taking her reaching hand, I stooped and picked her up bodily from where she sat. She clung to a book snatched from the shelves, in her surprise. I kissed her at random over face, neck and head that had good-smelling, thick hair with golden glints in it. . .

A shrill exclamation of virginal fright, not at me,—but at my abrupt, hungry masculinity. . .

"Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing, Gregory?"

Billy's voice boomed deeper than usual. I had thought that Cora and I were alone, but Billy had been taking a bath.

I turned and faced her as she strode in: she had noiseless sandals on, and wore striped pajamas.

"Oh, Billy," gasped Cora, "he forced me to let him kiss me!"

"She asked me to help her up, and, just for a joke——"

Cora was trembling as if I had done something horribly unnatural.

"What did you kiss the girl for, when she didn't want you to?"

The veins on Billy's forehead stood out.

"In the future," she was laying down the law, "you see to it that you let Cora strictly alone—or keep entirely out of here—you understand?"

Cora had run to Billy and nestled in her sturdy arms, as in the arms of an indignant, protective brother. . .

"In your 'search for a mate' as you phrase it,—as far as Cora's concerned, it's no trespassing—get me?"

For a full minute we stood boldly face to face, glaring steadily and scornfully into each other's eyes, like two men brawling over a woman's favor.

. . . . . .

Jack Matthewson was back from his hut in the Jersey hills.

I liked Matthewson's quiet, priestly smile bespeaking tranquil certainty of himself.

He had never offered to show me any of his essays, and I liked that, too, and it made me believe in him. I asked him point-blank to show me some of his work. . .

His writing was like himself—perpetually placid like waters that reflect the same cloudless sky without change . . there was a literary charm, an exquisite feeling for the precise use of words in his work . . but there was nothing else. . .

"Jack, I'm sure that in your last incarnation you were an eighteenth century classic scholar at Oxford, musing over your Greek and Latin texts, and attempting an occasional paper for the Spectator and the Tatler."

"My frequent dream is one of medieval buildings overgrown high

and thick with tranquil ivy," he replied, sitting back decoratively in his high-peaked ecclesiastic chair, and draped in his silver-grey dressing gown. . .

With leisurely fine hands he went through the office of shaving.

He started the percolator going.

"You'll have some coffee and breakfast toast with me?"

"Breakfast, when it's twelve o'clock?"

"Gentlemen never rise before twelve."

He prepared the toast, in tiny, even, brown squares.

. . . . . .

"It's raining. I love the sound of rain on roofs . . out there in our cottage I was never cast in such a pleasant mood of reflection and meditation as when the rain was sounding in all the leaves outside and running in endless patter over the roof."

"Yes," I responded, "there's nothing like rain for inspiration . . the happiest I've ever been—almost—was once when I was on the bum in central Texas . . I had a bag full of hand-outs I'd begged at various backdoors . . in order to have a supply of food ahead. . .

"And there I was, snuggled back, and holding my nose just a literal inch withdrawn from a steady, lancelike downpour filling all the landscape . . snug I was, in a cavity cattle had eaten in a haystack. . .

"I had a book of poetry, a stub of pencil, a few bits of paper.

"An unknown tramp, and just out of jail—I was young and buoyed up by tremendous dreams of fame. In fancy I had, as they say, the world by the tail.

"I don't remember what town it was near—but whenever any one says 'comfort,' I have a mental picture of myself snug in a haystack, a world of rain falling just an inch beyond my nose."

. . . . . .

Across the area back of Jack's half of the apartment, and beyond the tops of two ailanthus trees, stood the windows of a box factory. Girls, mostly, worked there. At noontide they sat in the windows eating their luncheon.

"It's fun to sit here writing . . from time to time glancing up, and flirting. . ."

"Look! there they are now, some of them. Aren't they the bright-

colored little birds? twittering as if they didn't know whether to fly off in a flock or not!"

Gently affable, Jack waved to them. His obvious handsomeness evoked eager, answering signals. I waved, too; but behaved too excitedly; they paid most of their attention to Jack. I tried not to seem hurt.

"Do you flirt often with them?"

"Sure, just to see how they react."

"How do they react?"

"I've made a few dates with them . . but they're at their best, across an area . . close up, they chew gum detestably, and talk with the awful New York squawk."

. . . . . .

"—Wonder where Lilla is," Jack mused abstractly, "she's been out, somewhere, all night."

"—Worried?"

"No; she knows how to take care of herself. Besides what she does is her own affair—we're free agents," he stretched his arms up, clasping the palms of his interlocked, tender hands back of his head, tilting his ecclesiastic chair at an angle. He looked across at the girls in the windows again, flashed them a telegraphic smile, then glanced thoughtfully at the ceiling—"girls—women—" he observed, "at present I'm quite satisfied with Lilla—quite!"

"She's a handsome woman."

"The right distinction. I've often told her she ought to have been a man."

. . . . . .

Matthewson frankly entered into the details of their economic relationships:

"For a long time I've not held a job. I work hard at my writing, harder than a man holding down a regular job; but I earn nothing. What do you think of the situation?"

"Why shouldn't a woman support a man engaged at some unremunerative artistic or literary work? . . when so many men support women in idleness?"

"Johnny, why don't you let, say, Janice, do the same for you?—let her take you in charge and free you from economic worry while you finish 'The Family' you've spoken so much about?"

"Janice isn't good-looking enough," I blurted, before I knew it.

. . . . . .

Lilla romped in, glad as a child to find Jack unexpectedly home from the country. Forgetting the presence of another, she kissed and kissed him, while he stood impassive and bland. . .

"Dearest, dearest man, but it *is* good to have you again! Did you get much writing done out there, dear?"

"Quite a lot, Lilla."

For the first time noticing me, and turning to me, her eyes bright with adventure—"you should have been with us last night, Johnny——

"Janice, Junius, Harry Parnell, and I—we all slept on the end of a dock.

"When the night watchman stumbled upon us, he thought we were crazy at first; but a flask of whiskey made him human and gave him understanding.

"It was great out there . . whistles calling everywhere, like all the ships of all the world coming in and going out."

Before Lilla had come Jack confessed——

"I like to flirt, just flirt, nothing else,—with every pretty girl I run into—anywhere, don't you?"

"I like to flirt all right; but I can't always summon up the boldness to . . I lack the assurance, I guess, that your handsomeness gives you. . .

"Then, too, there's that quivery, weak feeling at the pit of the stomach—that holds all the faintness of the solar plexus punch. . .

"All strange, good-looking women give me that feeling."

"That feeling's nothing unusual," explained Jack, "it comes from a man's sexual hunger . . like hunger for food. . .

"You must school yourself not to show how you feel, in your face —about women . . not to look too eager . . that drives them off . . learn to look interested, yet be impassive. Keep them puzzled; that's what fetches them."

"But it's much more than sexual hunger that stops me half-way; it's a bigger thing than that . . it's the mystery of the OTHERNESS of women that sets me a-tremble——

"The tremendous mystery, in spite of the smut of Rabelais, on the one hand, of the artificial purity of Tennyson, on the other."

"You nut,—don't you think our OTHERNESS of sex is just as mysterious to women,—creating the same inward panic in them?"

. . . . . .

My first and last attendance at the annual Whitman Dinner—all the king's horses never could drag me to another. . .

These *regular* people in evening dress gathered mainly to dine and drink, with the panegyrization of Whitman the pretext—whom, alive and not yet come into his posthumous fame, most of those assembled would have snubbed!

—Catch *them* riding on tops of busses making friends with drivers, lounging about easily, and sitting down for rests on street curbs! . . God save us from carefully ironed and pressed disciples that flock to greatness after the battle's won! . .

Hartley Allison Danforth had brought me to the banquet.

"But what we've said hardly applies to Traubel over there!"

I looked to where sat Whitman's greatest disciple. He was a stocky, easy-faced, majestic-looking man under a mane of iron-grey hair.

"Do you know the Conservator?" Danforth asked me. "It's more provocative of thought than any of the literary magazines."

"Yes, and mostly written by Traubel . . that's why . . but his disciples . . I draw the line at disciples of a disciple . . that's spinning out the spider's web twice.

"—Traubel's style . . he knows no punctuation mark but the period. Subject, object, predicate-stop; subject, object, predicate-stop; it's like riding on a street car run by a new motorman."

The speeches began . . acclamation of Whitman, the New Christ, his Leaves of Grass, the Bible of all wisdom. . .

. . . . . .

In a guttural, foreign-sounding voice, a man wearing a fuzzy, reddish beard all over his face bespoke himself distinctly and rebukingly to a waiter serving his section——

"Tell me why you are waiting on these damned bourgeois?—aren't you ashamed of yourself?—I'd strike first before I——"

The waiter flew into a rage; he bade the man who had so bespoken him, to take off his glasses, come outside, and fight. . .

"There's another true disciple!" I jested.

"Dear old Ravenél's a loveable soul, when you get to know him."

"Is that André Ravenél?" I asked.

I had never seen him before, but I had long known of him, as a well-known anarchist writer, always starting rumpuses and magazines. . .

"But, my friend, to offer to fight me is no answer to my question—in fact, nothing could be more beside it—again—I repeat—WHY—" but before Ravenél could proceed further, violent hands were laid upon him, he was jerked upward and backward from his seat, and the house detective and several waiters propelled him across the length of the dining room and out at the door, gathering speed as they went.

"That's what they call 'the bum's rush,' " I observed, amused, yet disgusted——

"—The Bum's Rush,—but it's proper place is in the barroom of a rowdy saloon, not here, at a Whitman Dinner."

"You're right, Gregory!" Danforth's eyes were fiery; he rose to protest, when Ravenél burst in, returning with a black eye, his shirt-collar torn, but determined not to be ejected again.

"Stop!" Danforth commanded, halting the house detective and his aids; then scathingly rebuking the assemblage for not having a sense large enough to handle the situation. . .

Horace Traubel also rose to protest.

Ravenél was conducted back to his seat by a now obsequious entourage. . .

"But I wont take back a word—you are all damned Bourgeoisie that Whitman himself would be ashamed of!"

The assemblage now laughed; some applauded; having evidently decided to accept Ravenél's denunciation as a rough sort of humor. . .

. . . . . .

I retain no remembrance as to when and where I first met Danforth, celebrated sociological and political writer. It seemed that he had always been my friend.

A man of means more than ample, he helped many a needy Radical, espoused many a Cause that promised amelioration for any of the ills of society. . .

A face lean, sincere, and eager, alight with perpetual interestedness in every question, artistic, literary, economic—keen, penetrative

eyes of unceasing thought and disquisition—tall, thin, quick-spirited, dark——

He was, and is, an Intellectual in the finest sense of that abused word.

. . . . . .

I must sell "The Western Wife" to some one; narrative verse was in vogue; surely some one would buy it.

Masefield had begun the vogue for the longer, narrative form of poetry; hitherto the editors had exclaimed against the use of anything metrical except as tail-pieces and fillers. Now they were following the fashion.

. . . . . .

I settled back into one of the large, leather-upholstered chairs in the reception room of "The National," waiting.

Lephil was to give me his decision on my "Western Wife" that day.

He came out. He offered me first a propitiatory cigarette:

"There's no necessity holding this poem of yours till Mann returns from Boston. I'm sorry, but we shan't be able to use it——"

"But, Mr. Lephil, it's right in line with the requirements of 'The National'—it's on a modern American subject——"

"Gregory, you must have read Masefield!"

"Mr. Lephil, I swear I haven't."

"Do you actually mean to say—" he pursued, with even greater incredulity——

"—That I have not read a line of his poetry—yes!

"Several months ago, when Whellen called my attention to what he said was an amazing similarity between myself and Masefield,—it gave me a scare; instead of going at once to the great English poet to find out the truth of the matter, I avoided it—if we were naturally alike, that was my right; but if I read what he had written I might really fall under his power——"

"It's too bad then, I must say, that your work didn't come out before his. But wait a minute." He rang a bell.

"Miss Zenias, that manuscript of Masefield's" turning to me, "a long narrative poem dealing with life on a sailing ship; it's big stuff, but we couldn't take it, because of its length!"

The girl came with the script.

"Here it is. You can't take it away with you; but sit in the outer office and read it."

The poem was "Dauber." . .

After an hour I burst into Lephil's office unannounced. He looked up, slight annoyance on his face at my doing so.

"Good God, Lephil," I cried, in my excitement forgetting to "mister" him—"do you mean to tell me you rejected THIS?"

"It would take up too much space."

"I'd have bought it and brought it out as a supplement, if necessary . . most of the other English poets, including many of the greatest—you can see that they write of the ocean, always looking out on it from the shore; or if at sea, merely as passengers . . but this has the real sea in it . . the smell of oakum; the cook's galley; the fo'c'sle with its sea-chests and boots lying about, and its smell of oilskins. . ."

Then I turned my mind to my own narrative poems through which I had hoped to install my first fame by beginning a new mode of poetry, and realized that Masefield had got there before me.

But, before I left, Lephil lent me a bit of parting advice:

"If you'd but keep abreast of the times in your craft, Gregory—leave off your exclusive reading of the classics—you might have spared yourself a lot of trouble.

"I once knew a rather remarkable man, a self-made philosopher, who planned and wrote a book of philosophy 'entirely out of his own brain,' as he phrased it . . to that end refused to read the philosophers, for fear it might take away from the originality of his thought. . .

"What he wrote would have been a great contribution to the world, provided Descartes had not said it better, several centuries before.

"For twenty years my 'home-made philosopher' had been wasting his great talent, through a culpable lack of knowledge that every Freshman acquires in his first year in College."

. . . . . .

I was heartsick.

I hurried to the Forty-second Street Library where I drew out all of the Masefield books.

Then my heartsickness was eased somewhat by the discovery for myself of a new great English poet.

. . . . . .

Mortimer Hale, Bennett Whellen's manager, gossiped about his employer every time I came in . . about how he treated his authors . . how he seldom kept accurate accounts of royalties . . and, when he attempted to, it was a joke . . that he conducted his publishing business on a basis of personal likes and dislikes, as a woman did her friendships and loves. . .

"But, if he likes you, you're liable to receive royalties, whether they're coming to you or not."

"That's not such a bad arrangement, Mr. Hale."

"—The Robin Hood of publishers, robs Peter to pay Paul. . .

"Yes sir, if he thinks you're a young poet of genius, he's good any time for a hundred or so, advance . . when he knows your book wont sell over fifty copies——

"It's the fellow whose book sells that's the one to suffer."

In England, Mortimer Hale's great-grandfather, grandfather, and father had been publishers before him . . well-established publishers.

On his father's death he had taken over the business, but had soon run foul of the Law by publishing an unexpurgated edition of Sir Arthur Fanshawe's "Tales from Arabian Gardens."

The Judge: "Mr. Hale, do you think this book, 'Tales from Arabian Gardens,' suitable for the reading of boys and girls of sixteen?"

Mortimer Hale: "But, your Lordship, that's beside the question; I didn't have the least intention of selling it to boys and girls of sixteen."

Hale, like Wilde, had been afforded the gentleman's chance of escape to the Continent, and unlike Wilde, rather than go to prison, he had availed himself of the chance. . .

He had fled to Paris, had finally come to America, where, after years of unprosperous struggle, an embittered man and still comparatively on his uppers, he was now selling, at a scant rate, he averred, his superior brains and publishing experience to Whellen.

. . . . . .

The benches in Washington Square were becoming impossible for meditative purposes. All the Italian boys whose families lived in

the streets back of the park had procured shoe polish, a box, and brush, and were swarming therein, a plague of bootblacks, draggling up and down the walks and yelling "shine," "shine" . . they'd stand in front of you, pointing at your shoes, till you were forced to take notice to get rid of them.

"Shine, Joe? have a shine?"

"My name isn't Joe, and I don't want a shine."

"Shine both shoes for a nickel, Joe," would be the pert reply.

"Get out!"

And if, to rid yourself of their insistence, you had a shine, they'd not notice, but still cry "shine," "shine."

I shut my book and rose irritably from the bench on which I had been sitting.

"Why doesn't some one declare a pogrom on bootblacks?"

Though filled with a blinding afternoon sun, it had been a brisk day; pleasantly warm between rests of wind, chill, when eddies of wind arose. . .

Walking into it from the outside blare, Janice's library was thick with dusk to me. I groped toward the bookshelves: my hand came against a woman instead of lighting on a book.

"Beg pardon, but, coming in out of the sun——"

A rippling laugh of amused embarrassment, a rustling of raiment; silence . . this was probably one of the women who came to Janice for advice.

"Are you waiting to see Miss Godman?"

"Yes, have you any idea of what's keeping her?"

My eyes having rapidly grown accustomed to the more subdued interior light, there came under their observation a woman on the orange-colored couch, who was gathered up in a strange posture . . she sat bolt upright, her feet tucked under her unseen . . as hushed as a Buddha, and clad in a quite voluminous dress of silk. . .

Chinese she looked, or Tartar rather . . her skin was of the color of old, warm-looking ivory . . her hair,—utterly black to the extent of exhibiting blue-black glints as she turned her head in the light—was parted and drawn exactly close on either side of her small, shapely head . . the lapsed wings of a bird. . .

The old constriction of woman-fear tightened my throat; the old trembling took me. I sat in front of the books, pretending to be

entirely absorbed in them, while observing her out of the corner of an eye.

"Do you like poetry?" I ventured.

"Yes."

"A superfluous question, wasn't it?"

"Why?"

"Because you're like a poem, yourself." I floundered awkwardly, saying more to the same effect, and talking more and more idiotically.

I was more at ease, observing her pleased smile, dangerously close to a simper. And the look in her eyes was now just as if she had flung her arms open to accept me in between them.

All her attitude, all her being, became invitation.

My embarrassment had melted under the warmth of it.

It seemed natural and inevitable that I should go quickly on my knees beside her, and put my arms around her body, drawing her toward me.

Beneath her long robe of thin silk I felt only a brassiere. . .

Pliant and spontaneous, her arms went about me, in turn, and our mouths melted into the complete fusion of a kiss. . .

We had just time to start apart, when Janice slithered in down the corridor, from the hall.

"Hello," in an exclamation of surprise yet tolerance that showed she was aware,—"I knew there'd be a cataclysm when you two came together!"

The woman set her feet forth. They were small feet, encased in embroidered Chinese shoes of black cloth . . rising, her mulberry-colored robe flowed in folds about her body and legs.

"You two don't know each other's names yet, and I'll bet you've been kissing already."

Our silent embarrassment confessed to the truth of her rallying charge.

"Not that it matters, now let me introduce you."

Thus I met Valery Malkan.

"And now, Valery, behold, in Johnny Gregory here, the solution of your problem . . your opportunity to chuck your callous painter over, and take a poet instead.

"At present Johnny's emotionally starved and has no sweetheart; he's been questing about, running himself gaunt. . .

"Johnny'll be glad to tide you over until you're strong enough to break away from your emotional dependence on Turner Jordan . . a thing you're too femininely weak to do alone."

I backed off, perturbed; it sounded as if Janice were performing a Radical marriage ceremony over us . . an urging and sanction that were unnecessary; for Valery and I shared the rapport of two children pleased with each other's company at first meeting.

Then strange behavior on the part of Janice began:

First, though she could see that both of us shook with the anticipatory eagerness of passion, Janice insisted on our staying for supper.

And when I kissed Valery openly before her, she developed an unaccountable irritability, not compatible with her previous approval of our developing relationship. She vented herself of many sarcasms concerning our precipitate behavior. She walked nervously out of and into the room again and again.

"—Valery, I can't wait. Let's go."

Putting her hand fondly against my cheek——

"Be patient. We must be polite to Janice and not rush off. I'm not going to cheat you. I need you just as much as you do me."

"I could eat you alive, that's how much I need you!"

Janice hurried in, catching us kissing.

Almost clapping her hands in fretfulness, she exclaimed:

"Come, you love-birds . . run on home now . . I've done my part——"

Janice's face was flushed; her eyes gleamed with sharp points.

She might well have pushed us with her hands out at the door, and her dismissal of us could not have been more surprisingly abrupt,—in one who had, a little while before, detained us against our wills.

. . . . . .

"Valery, what the devil was the matter with Janice, do you think? I've never known her to act so before!"

"Couldn't you see? she was jealous!"

"But she and I are only friends."

"That doesn't matter, where a man and woman's concerned."

"I refuse to believe it.

"Janice Godman is one of the exceptional women who possess a spirit beyond such pettiness."

"Are you still inexperienced enough to believe that?"

. . . . . .

As I accompanied Valery Malkan to her apartment, I wore no hat, no tie, and my soft shirt flared open two buttons down the throat. While Valery gathered up in a heap the voluminous surplusage of her robe of silk like a train; showing beneath, lemon-colored hose to the knee . . proud of her symmetric legs and slender ankles.

She also went bareheaded, a band of black velvet keeping in place the two folded wings of her black, lustrous hair.

As I had been embarrassed by the homeliness of Jerry, by the diminutiveness of Beryl, so I was once more embarrassed by the unique get-up of Valery.

It did not matter that I myself was dressed apart from the usual norm of dress; I walked by her side, aware of the ridiculing eyes and voices of other people on the street. She went, oblivious to all this, thinking only of having me for her possession, fondly retaining her clasp of my hand that brought me additional discomfiture. . .

Thus, through the intersecting, thronged Village streets, she conducted me to her three-room flat. . .

Her rooms were gently dim and full of a shadowy orange tint that came from light sifting in through long curtains that she had herself dyed that color.

. . . . . .

"Do you think I'm too fat?—just a little?"

"At first I did,—yes! but now I realize it was your long dress all in folds that made you seem so . . Valery, do you know that you ought to wear tailormade clothes—to keep your appearance—just plump—as you are! . .

"You ought to dress like Vera Williams—you know her?"

"Yes, I've met her."

"In a plain business suit you'd look quite neat, where Vera looks dowdy . . I think your present gown would become her more than it does you. . .

"To tell the truth, I did think you a trifle fat. But, this way, without anything on—you're perfect!"

And she was; taper and polished in sloping limb and arm . . the

warm color of old ivory lay on all her flesh . . her body felt as smooth as glass.

. . . . . .

The furniture about the rooms was quaint . . every object was made out of what had originally been a grocery box, "that the Italian grocer below" had given her . . chairs; tables; cupboard; dresser; bed; couch. . .

But you couldn't detect what they had been manufactured out of; as each bit of furniture was decorated in a primitively startling, yet very attractive manner . . it was Turner Jordan who had supplied the decorations.

On the walls hung several paintings of Valery in the nude . . vividly and broadly colored . . Gauginish in effect . . they evinced genius of the first rank. . .

. . . . . .

"Who painted these canvases of you?" I put the superfluous question.

Still in my arms, she informed me "Turner Jordan," and gave herself over to brief tears of resentment and misery. . .

But momentarily she changed her mood and asked——

"Do you like spaghetti mixed with green peppers, and squares of steak with bits of garlic stuck in them?"

"I eat everything, Valery."

. . . . . .

Hartley Allison Danforth, coming in to town from his Long Island home, and following a growing custom of his, proceeded to look me up.

I think my crazy, irregular life must have interested him; and he liked discussing things with me.

I think his keenest enjoyment of being with me came from listening to my cursing and raging at the various economic and social abuses of the world . . though half my anger against them was personal, was caused by the narrow circumstances within which I was forced to bound my life.

He did not see this; nor did I, then.

Danforth took me to dinners at French restaurants, where I learned to love the white wines like the red. He took me to Radical

dinners and banquets at the Café Boulevard; we went to debates and exhibits together.

"How would you like to go to the International Art Exhibit with me, at the 69th Street Armory?" asked Danforth, "it mightn't comprise great art, but it's at least significant and alive."

. . . . . .

"Yes, Allison; you're right; there is a dynamism about even the worst paintings here that most of the old fellows lack."

We were standing before the celebrated "Nude Descending a Staircase."

Though it created amusement, and though one art critic had wittily dubbed it "An Explosion in a Shingle Factory," there was a vigor and beauty in the painting that could not be denied.

"These pictures at least stir people's blood and imagination—evoke controversy, giving art the place it should always have in life; making it more than the mere topic for quiet gentlemanly and ladylike interchange of conversational banalities."

"Over in France," said Danforth, "they're actually fighting duels over Futurism and Cubism, I've heard. . .

"But, look at this nude!"

He called my attention to a giant painting of a semi-recumbent nude woman of full body that tapered off incredibly into dainty wrists, hands, ankles, feet,—little feet and hands that dandled loosely either side an orange-colored couch.

The flesh of the body was what he objected to, as unnatural—the golden-yellowish color of it.

A strange feeling of reminiscence stole over me, of familiarity that I couldn't quite place.

"—Don't you like it?" I asked.

"—most remarkable, you've got to admit,—but the color of the skin!"

"I know a girl who looks exactly like that!" I exclaimed forgetfully, in a loud voice; the crowd clustered about, overhearing my naïve asseveration—an audible snicker ran through them.

Then I recognized the wings of coal-black hair, bluish-glinted, that pressed close to the small, fine head. At the same moment I grew aware of a bristling hostility at my shoulder. I sensed that some one who hated me was standing close behind me. Slowly turn-

ing my head, I looked into the eyes of a man I did not know . . the eyes of a swart, stocky man, which, small and black, blazed indignation and hate toward me.

And I realized not only that the picture was one of Valery Malkan, but that the artist who had painted her—the stocky, dark chap with mad eyes reduced to black beads of hatred just behind me—was none other than Turner Jordan.

. . . . . .

Now that I had Valery, my restlessness was somewhat eased. I wrote hard. I scarcely gave a thought to the fellow I was ousting. . .

When I related the incident that happened in front of the painting of her, Valery was perturbed: "Yes, that was Jordan that stood behind you; I only hope he doesn't take it in his head to raise a row; if he does, and it gets out that there's a nude picture of me in the Armory, I'll lose my job."

"But he wouldn't be that mean!"

"You don't know him; when he gets going, he's like a spiteful child."

. . . . . .

"You look less troubled; your face looks more smoothed out; I hope you're happier now."

I assured Janice that I was happier.

"I'm glad I brought the Delayed Adolescent and The Primal Woman together.

"There need be no nonsense about it, Johnny,—nothing but a frank giving and taking:

"She needed to break with that brute of a Jordan, and you needed an attachment with no strings to it. . .

"The need of men and women for each other is so great," Janice continued, "and yet so simple, that a civilized being ought never to forgive either Church or State for fastening vampire-like on that primal, simple need,—battening on it, turning it into a thing difficult and complex, and so deranging the happiness of the world. . .

"It's ghastly, what they've done to humanity, in the name of God and of Order. . .

"Forcing men and women into oaths of eternal fidelity, catching them up in their dreadful tissues of priestcraft and statecraft——

"Instead of letting them alone, to satisfy simply this general, honest sex-hunger nature has woven into the fibers of their being:

"Sex-expression is as much a necessity as eating, and its indulgence no more to be interfered with——"

"But," I interposed, for the sake of the argument—"people themselves introduce unnecessary complications—jealousy of possession, emotional dependence——"

"Which is all the more reason why the priest and the lawyer should keep hands off and not add worse complications—to what is already complicated enough, for all its inherent simplicity——

"It has been argued that, without the restraints of legal and religious marriage, children would be abandoned by their parents . . which is the silliest statement of all; there's nothing stronger than the maternal instinct; and the next strongest, after that—the paternal——"

She paused and looked, smiling, at me,—"you have, for instance, a strong paternal instinct—I've seen you patting kids on the head, along the street——"

"But having them around, that's a different matter——

"As long as I live, books shall be my only offspring——"

"—Better look out for Valery, then: she desires children—that's one of the things that's disorganizing her——

"She likes to be bullied, too . . that's why, I think—" Janice checked herself.

"Why you think—what?"

"I don't wish to cut in on something I myself helped start—especially when it's progressing favorably—for Valery herself has let me know how fond she's growing of you——

"But, unless you misuse her, mistreat her a trifle, she'll—I think—end up by chucking you and going back to Turner Jordan."

" 'Mistreat'? you mean that I'll actually have to give her beatings to hold her?"

"I mean exactly that."

"Janice, I've never clouted a woman yet, except that time I thumped Hildreth in the ribs, down in our cottage on the Jersey coast; and then it was to break her of her habit of striking me, in one of her fits of half-assumed hysteria.

"If I find that I have to beat Valery to hold her, I'll quit her, first!"

"That's a good, decent feminist resolution and attitude, and I like you for it."

. . . . . .

If Valery liked rough treatment, why had she desired to rid herself of Turner Jordan?

I learned that his brutality was mental as well as physical:

"He's forever insisting that he's too good for me . . he says, as we walk along the street—'don't you know you ought to be damned proud, walking beside a great artist?'

"And he can neither forget nor abide the fact, that, when I was sixteen, I had my first affair with *somebody* else long before I knew him! . ."

"Because of that, he falls into an unreasonable rage, and calls me 'slut', 'fallen woman', 'whore'!"

"He's a sweet one!"

"He asserts over and over that he'd be ashamed to introduce me to his friends or his family, because I'm an 'immoral woman';

"I could be happy with him if he'd only cut out his crazy behavior . . could cook for him . . mend his socks . . give him everything a woman can . . take care of him like the child he is."

"Why don't you stop talking about him?—forget about him?—you've got me, haven't you?"

But she didn't heed my remonstrances; instead, she was weeping, her head buried in her arms that were flung out disconsolately over the bizarre-painted table made of a large drygoods box.

In sympathetic, attempted consolation, I stroked her heavy, wing-folded coal-black hair.

"Never mind—he's a rotten dog!"

At my objurgation she raised her head, drying her eyes.

"I'll try not to mind—but please don't call him names, Johnny."

Suspiciously I asked——

"You don't mean to say that—he's been around here, since I——?"

She, not answering—I continued——

"I'd thought you'd written him not to come; that you were through?"

"He's thumped on the door several times," she admitted reluctantly, "but I wouldn't open to him."

"That's right," I commended, relieved.

"—wouldn't open it," she modified her declaration, "because he varies banging on the door with shoving under it, obscene letters, telling me what I am."

"—hope he bangs some day when I happen to be here . . I'll open the door, all right!"

"You mustn't start a fight," she begged, "if we had a rumpus, I'd be put out of my flat . . and it's too comfortable and cheap, to lose."

. . . . . .

Jessie Cummins and Jim Benders had invited me to dinner at their flat.

I showed up early. Jim had been out seeing magazine editors, and had not yet returned. Evidently, Jessie said, he had stopped to have a beer somewhere . . probably he had gone around to Mrs. Nough's, collected Julius Flatman, and proceeded to the Grapevine . . which was what he generally did, when he was late coming home.

"Prices are mounting higher every day . . the best eggs at five cents apiece, can you beat it? But I wouldn't live anywhere else but in New York."

She hurried into a smaller room to see what was the matter with her crying baby. . .

"I wish Jim would hurry—he daddles about as if calendars and time didn't exist."

. . . . . .

Already I knew all about Jessie and Jim,—Janice, my informant.

Theirs was a Free Union. They had one child, a husky little animal that rolled about, clad in its diaper, on a bed in an adjacent room . . catching at its toes and trying to eat them.

Four nights a week Jessie taught Spanish at five dollars an evening. . .

During the day she bustled with miscellaneous activity. Once a month she furnished a story to "The Homemaker," a magazine for women.

Thus she provided support for herself, her child, and for Benders, too; Benders was by no means shiftless, though slower and more lei-

surely in his motions than his compact-bodied, fair-haired, industrious little mate, whose rapid darting hither and thither reminded me of the busy movements of a dragonfly.

It chanced, however, that he was devoting himself to the unremunerative art of writing poetry. He gave himself unremittingly to doing his best at it, with a passion and artistic honesty that knew few peers in New York . . and without considering what the requirements of the magazines were for verse.

. . . . . .

"I believe in Jim Benders as a coming poet—" Janice "a poet whose greatness the world will soon acknowledge . . but I'm afraid for his life because he has a fine head and fine eyes, but no chin."

"Many successful men have no chins," I argued.

Then I detected that Janice was figuratively alluding to his life with Jessie. . .

"Anyhow, the first two years with Jessie were good for him . . enabled him to get an excellent start, to do some fine work he would otherwise not have found leisure for, if he'd had to hustle for himself. . .

"But this is their third year, and I think he ought to be breaking away . . but his weak chin won't let him."

"How about the girl-baby,—Janice?"

"Jessie's thoroughly competent to take care of it . . all by herself . . which she does, as it is.

"And she's too strong for Jim, swamps his gentler personality."

. . . . . .

Before Jim had sauntered in, that evening, Jessie had cast about until she had drawn from me the foregoing pronouncements of Janice.

Her strong, firmly modeled, pretty face, glowed ordinarily with a clear, healthy fire, beneath a gust of fair, fiery hair.

Now it glowed ruddier from angriness, on her hearing the judgment of Janice on her marital affairs.

Through lips slightly too thick and passionate she exclaimed:

"God damn Janice, I wish she'd stop picking at me, trying to pry Jim loose."

"Why—I'm sure——" I was defending Janice.

"Don't palliate her mischief: when I'm teaching Spanish at the

Night School earning our bread and butter, Jim's off with her, at 'The Working Girls' Home' or 'The Old Farm'—gabbing, and settling all the problems of the universe.

"You watch, I'll read her the riot act yet!"

After Jessie's agitation had subsided somewhat, she smiling at herself, through tears of indignation—I put the question:

"Don't you think in some ways, though, Janice is splendid?"

"O, I suppose so; I suppose I am unfair—that half of what I said was caused by instinctive jealousy—but how can you tell, as regards Janice, where her social and impersonal offices end, and her own narrower interests begin?"

I responded:

"I wonder if she herself always knows? I don't think she ever deliberately meddles."

"If she did, that would afford me a handle to lay hold of. . .

"O, well, I guess I ought to light in to Jim instead."

A minute after:

"Say, look here, why don't *you* take Janice?" Jessie queried, pausing in her cooking. . .

"Because, though I admire her——" I fidgeted——

At this juncture Jim sauntered easily in, whistling meditatively.

"Hello, folks!"—tossing his crumpled, soft hat onto a bench.

Jim had an engaging, plausible voice. When he spoke, he spoke in few words, but they made you want to believe whatever he said; to be his friend forever. . .

Sensing some topic of discussion left hanging in the air——

"Well, well—bet you two've been discussing Janice," he observed cheerily: he kissed Jessie a loose-mouthed, fond smack on the flushed check that she presented reprovingly because he had come so late. . .

"Jim will come late to his own funeral."

Jim laughed pleasantly, sent me the wink-unseen by Jessie,—over her shoulder.

"Come, come, Diddy! Don't act petulant, before you hear my case. I've been sitting in the Grapevine drinking a couple of beers with old 'Red' Flatman"—triumphantly—"this afternoon I sold a poem to 'Everybody's' . . I had to celebrate!"

Jim made wide, genial eyes at me, like a circus clown.

Jessie was pacified . . her eyes shining fondly over the genial,

hulking boy-man . .they put an arm about each other's waist, turning to me. . .

"You mustn't mind a family spat, Johnny."

"I don't. I've seen them before."

"Dare say you have!" returned Jim, his easy voice covering the detection of any sarcasm he might have meant.

. . . . . .

The steaming food was on the table.

The baby began to cry.

"You poets sit down and fall to, before the food gets cold. There goes the baby. I forgot to heat her milk for her."

"Bring the kid out and I'll hold her on my knee while I eat."—Jim.

The aggressive, smallish woman moved briskly into the room and brought the baby out. Jim took the child on his knee, holding it in place by spreading one large hand over its back, feeding himself with the other.

"Hi diddle, di de—O," sang Jim between mouthfuls.

. . . . . .

We took turns reading our poetry aloud—Jim and myself . . obviously happy; before we were aware, two o'clock pulsed red on the Metropolitan Tower which we could see from the high window at which we sat. . .

The Jefferson Market clock was lit like a beacon, nearby,—but there was no time to be told by it; it had stopped short three days before at ten o'clock.

"Maybe time has slid into eternity, and *that* clock is the only true one, signalling the fact to the world by budging its hands no further. . .

" 'Time is no more; all the other clocks are faking', maybe that's what it's trying to say!"—Jim's fantasy.

"Or maybe it got tired waiting for eternity."—I put in.

"Foolish poets!" interjected Jessie.

"—a beautiful object, that illuminated tower—standing there, speaking calm and peace to the feverish Village."

" 'Speaking calm and peace' by coercion."

"—right over a jail."

"I didn't think of that!"

"The bunch that live over in Patchin Place say it's too frightful, at times——"

"What's too frightful?"

"The way the poor devils of prisoners yell and carry on inside there."

"The Third Degree, I guess."

"Delirium Tremens, oftener, on the part of some drunk—or the fits some drug fiend throws, deprived of his drug."

"Randall O'Liam, the Irish poet, says it sometimes grows so bad they can hardly endure to live any longer in Patchin Place."

. . . . . .

"Jefferson Market Police Court—you should have Janice conduct you to Night Court there.

"Women's Night Court, you know—street walkers—birds draggled in the gutter . . led before the judge. . .

"The City has a Special Vice Squad—well-dressed, contemptible, young agents provocateurs . . brutal, smug faces . . the poor girls haven't a chance . . framed up, for the most part . . either some poor street walker that doesn't come across with enough graft, or—worst aspect—ignorant working girls clutching at romance—they let themselves be spoken to by these,—these fellows—then they're snapped up—accused of picking up men on the street. . .

"And shyster lawyers hanging about the court—professional bondsmen—ready to 'help' the girls for a consideration: thus the women are driven deeper into commercialized licentiousness, for which the Night Court is supposed to be the remedy."

"It's a dirty, crying shame."

"Janice, and a few other Radicals, are out after the Abuse—you watch, they'll make that dirty, criminal gang hop, before they're through!"

"—the real anarchists that endanger society,—such officials!"

. . . . . .

It was at Valery's that I met André Ravenél again . . Dava Juston accompanying him—Dava Juston, who soon after started and ran so successfully one of the few, unpretentiously bohemian and companionable restaurants I have known . . a restaurant where outsiders were made to keep to themselves. . .

A firm, hard knock on Valery's door, forgetfully left unlocked, and Dava turned the knob swiftly without waiting. She came directly into the inner room where Valery and I were leaning together in each other's arms, talking . . we jumped apart and Dava laughed.

Ravenél was just a step behind. Between them stalked a Great Dane. . .

Ravenél was the neatest of anarchists . . never a fleck of dust on his clothes, and his shirt and soft collar snowy-white, a tiny, gold clasp-pin holding the ends of the collar together . . but the regulation flowing red tie . . and his red hair and beard, furzy in all directions. . .

"Hello, doggie!" reaching out, I patted the Great Dane on the head.

"Look out!" Dava warned me.

"There's no dog in the world I'm afraid of," I boasted idly, talking big; "when I was on the tramp I learned the technique of handling belligerent dogs."

"How do you handle them?" asked Dava scornfully.

"When a dog comes at you, hold out your hat; he'll jump for it; kick under the hat, and every time you'll catch him in the throat with the toe of your shoe."

"But Marfalka bites without the slightest intimation."

"Marfalka! that's a name for you!"

Dava and I had bristled at each other at the first look.

"It's a nice name," Dava, nettled—making a religion of a trivial issue . . looking at me inflexibly with her still, white face—a face that held such sustained force of will behind it as to drain and blanch it of blood, a very mask of still determination——

"We named it Marfalka after Marinetti's great novel of that name!" exclaimed Ravenél, ready for bitter debate.

"An idiotic book!" I rose to the challenge, shouting. I had never read "Marfalka" but acted as if I had . . I had read reviews of it, heard talk of it, that was all.

The argument rode on hotly, Dava asserting, abetted angrily by Ravenél, that Marinetti's "Marfalka" was as great as "Tom Jones" and "Vanity Fair"—as epoch-making . . Dava's manner of enunci-

ating this, accompanied by her habitual glare of still contempt and clenched superiority, was poison to my egotism.

I rose with a shout, while the Great Dane growled. I paid no attention to him, but strode up and down the room cursing, declaiming violently against Marinetti, Futurism, Free Verse . . sky-rocketing hyperboles, and, though not meaning to,—lending, by my manner, a personal thrust to what I meant to be abstract contention. . .

Finally I turned all my guns against Free Verse: I was personally angry at that school of poetry; here was one thing in which I never wavered toward Radicalism. . .

I despised (I shouted) the charlatan literary futurist who took Publicity for the Eleventh Muse; who considered being in men's mouths because of eccentricity, real achievement!

Going back to the early days of English Literature, I summarized all the freak schools of poetry that had run the Muse up blind alleys again and again. . . The school of Gabriel Harvey and the quantitative classic meters supposedly modelled on Greek and Latin prosody. . .

The aforesaid learned pedant had succeeded in enlisting Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sydney, till the author of the "Faerie Queen's" better instinct brought him clearer seeing. . .

"As for Philip Sydney, if you care to see what balderdash was perpetrated, dig up some of the lyrics in the classic meter scattered through the Arcadia."

Valery, proud of my erudition, caught my hand and squeezed it,—I plumping down on the couch beside her for an instant, before being up and at it again. . . I spoke of the Euphuists, those artificial writers who ransacked every coign of theology, superstition, and pseudo-science for rare and absurd metaphors. . .

I told of the writers who made the printed shapes of their poems fit into representations of urns, harps, needlecases and so forth. . .

I described the spasmodists—Alexander Smith, Betram Dobell and their followers—fellows who evidently unloaded whole notebooks of startling figures of speech into their poems—much as the new poets were doing—though the spasmodists used regular metrical forms. . .

"*Ho, God,*" I mocked, in parody, improvising——

"At last
I have discovered
Who you are—
You are a huge spider
Spinning
Worlds
Moons
Suns
Planets
Systems
Out of your belly!"

"There!" I paused to draw breath, "that's Free Verse for you . . and I could go on all day like that!"

"Doubtless you could—but it wouldn't have the slightest similarity to Free Verse," cut in the clear, steely voice of Dava,—"all this drivel and maundering of yours!"

"Gregory, you're a damn fool!" bellowed Ravenél, upholding his girl, and banging the iron ferrule of his cane on the floor in emphasis.

We glared, speechless for the moment, at each other.

The big dog was growing ominously disquieted.

Dava patted him placatively. He shifted the gear of his growl to a mean whine, glancing up at me, tentatively, through small, bloodshot eyes. . .

"No, no! Don't attempt to pet him!"—I was reaching for the dog's head—"and don't make any sudden movement toward us; he might think you're fighting us. . ."

"O, you Free-Versers, you futurists, you smart alecks of literature and art,—it's not appreciation of greatness and beauty, but eagerness to seem to be the first in on the 'know,' that actuates you—you're all crassly ignorant of the Past—you're perpetually afraid of being caught not knowing about the latest little puke of a rhymer and his freshest atrocity!"

"And you," exclaimed André Ravenél hotly,—"*you* think that only such fossils as Homer and Dante and Milton are great!"

"You idiot," I cried back at him exultantly, "literary and artis-

tic greatness have nothing to do with epochs of time—without knowing it, you've made just my point for me."

Swinging up and down and forgetting the dog——

"As for myself, *I* don't take on the latest mental fads from London and Paris—just as our feather-headed society dames follow the latest fashions in dress.

"You hug the conceit to yourselves that you're erudite, literary, accomplished,—when you're merely following modes in literary snobbery."

Valery was rolling on the couch overcome with laughter. Dava, less serious at last, her face wearing a mask of still, white laughter akin to a sneer—Dava was plucking Ravenél by the sleeve—"Come on, André . . let up on the man; you've won the argument."

"Good-by, Goddam Bourgeois!" shouted Ravenél, in parting, at the door . . the dog stalking out, protectively snarling, between him and Dava. . .

"Bourgeois?" I cried, aghast, when I could re-gather my presence of mind, overwhelmed by the greatest of slurs—"BOURGEOIS! VALERY, HE CALLED ME BOURGEOIS!"

"Please! Please!" begged Valery, tears of laughter pouring down her cheeks; my indignant exclamation setting her off a-fresh——

"Well, I'm mighty glad you find fun in a serious matter!"

Then I added vehemently, after a long pause—and somewhat irrelevantly——

"Valery, the everlasting standards of literature mean more to me than all the revolutions in the world!"

. . . . . .

"—But I didn't mean categorically to condemn all Free Verse; some of the poets who write it have certainly cleared away the dead wood and cluttering underbrush that obstructed true poetry—no matter if most of their work has eventuated in a thousand absurdities and false leads . . no matter if often what they write is what Max Eastman justly calls 'Lazy verse'. . .

"These chaps and the futurist painters are the pioneers, and they're probably clearing the way for a newer and more beautiful reality of art and literature——"

"Then why did you light violently into Ravenél?"

"Because he's such an ass I couldn't let myself admit the right in his side of the question."

. . . . . .

I discovered a bluish-green bruise the size of a silver dollar on Valery's right thigh. . .

"Where did you get that?"

"He was here yesterday. He kicked me. He says he knows I have another lover."

"Didn't you say, yes, you had?"

Unanswering, she glanced guiltily out at the window, at some children playing.

"Look here, Valery,—are you playing the two of us at once?"

"O, no,—but I can't seem to rid myself of him."

"Do you want to?"

"He's—he's a very great painter!" she answered.

"WHAT?" I was astounded—"after all the vile names he's showered on you? the open contempt he's shown?——"

"I know—O, can't you understand?" she implored weakly . . following with a flash of boldness, "I'm not fooling him; he knows who you are."

"—Hope you were courageous enough to tell him yourself!"

"I wasn't; but he found out; because all the crowd knows; your shouting out before his picture, that picture of me—why did you do that?"

"Look here, Val, I'll bet he lied to you, swearing I'd called out your name!"

Her silence assented to my guess. . .

Then——

"Johnny, you must promise me, if you ever meet Turner Jordan, —to be courteous, even placative . . he's—he's quite violent!"

"I'll wager he is—to a woman!"

. . . . . .

Turner Jordan and I soon met inadvertently, just outside the apartment house where Valery Malkan lived . . one afternoon . . he was ostensibly prowling about to find if Valery was in—while we were going out. . .

A baleful, Siamese-appearing chap, meeting me eye for eye.

Valery squeezed in fright against me. I clenched both fists, and

walked at him. He backed away, wheeling sidewise; then gave a jump backward to have the wall of the building behind him,—timidity and ferocity conjoined in his movements.

A policeman happened to be strolling by on the other side of the street. The mute drama caught his eye. He stopped short.

Valery noticed him, relieved; and spoke, in a low, determined voice, to both of us—about to rush at each other——

"I demand that you both immediately shake hands, or I'll call that policeman over——"

"Turner Jordan,—you're the man I've wanted to meet for a long time!" I observed sarcastically, threat in my voice, and a distorted grin of menace set hard on my face . . I pushed my hand into his, pulled him toward me with an abrupt gesture . . drew back my left fist as if to strike——

In the face of my resolute bearing, the timidity of the savage in him, ousted the ferocity of the savage; he drew back further, his small, satin-black eyes smouldering with hate. . .

While Valery and I walked on, he stood dazed for a moment.

Valery drew closer, clinging to my arm and not yet over her trembling. For now Jordan was following to catch up. Valery looked helplessly back over her shoulder. The cop had sauntered round the corner and out of sight. . .

I wheeled, bracing myself, as Turner Jordan caught up even.

He spoke in a furious hiss——

"Valery,—YOU LOOK LIKE HELL IN THAT DRESS!"

Then pompously he shouldered about, and marched off in the opposite direction.

The anti-climax astonished us into silence.

Then I began to think—and I realized that Jordan had been the true artist in fixing his point of anger on the clothes she wore. With discomfiture I surveyed her out of a stealthy side-eye, acknowledging to myself, that, though it had been I who had dissuaded her from her long, silken robe, she looked outlandish beyond description in the tailor-made suit she at present wore: much as any good-looking Japanese or Chinese woman would look, in European gear.

Valery, too, was distressed, knowing that my sartorial advice had been badly and inartistically given.

Fidgetting all through the meal, she observed herself in the mirror at Renganeschi's.

Turner Jordan had won a clever victory, scoring decisively over me.

. . . . . .

"Why did you ever bring that man Rankin here to tea?" asked Lilla Matthewson.

"Why—has he done something you didn't like?"

"He got the habit of dropping in alone to see me, without any invitation, on my part . . he'd squat, then, on the floor by the couch on which I lay resting, tired from the day's teaching. . .

"I didn't object to that—but when he began sliding gradually up beside me with the slow, imperceptible motion of the snake coming on its prey——

"Catching and holding a hand of mine before I knew—telling me all the while of his new philosophic religion—in that carefully modulated, deep, charming voice of his—a sort of hypnosis in it!—" Lilla paused parenthetically.

"The first five minutes he was here alone with me, he began—proposing that I leave Jack and run off to the country with him—he avowed that he had at last discovered the ideal mate, in me!"

"And——?"

"Yesterday . . he succeeded in making the couch—but, fortunately—for your friend's quite mad—Halton Mann, chancing in, knocked at the door just then."

. . . . . .

With the first ring at her bell, Valery softly and promptly opened the door for me:

"Sh! Johnny . . be quick, and hurry into the other room," pointing to the inner room where stood the couch on which she received me each time I came to see her . . not the bedroom on the other side of the kitchen . . conducting me in punctiliously. . .

"Wait for me here, a moment!"

I waited, wondering . . I picked up a book I had not seen there before, a recent book on cubism . . liking it and rebelling against it, at the same time, I turned over its illustrated leaves . . becoming restless, I called out——

"Valery, how much longer must I wait? what are you doing out there?"

Walking to get my answer, I sauntered into the kitchen, book idly in hand.

"Valery! O, Val!" in growing irritation, ignoring her injunction about keeping quiet. . .

And now she came swiftly to me out of the bedroom—into which I was never asked,—our intimate rendezvous being, ever, the room with the couch in it.

Valery was white, disheveled . . her long, silken robe, resumed, clung about her with the semblance of a half-discreet nightgown. . .

"Sh! Johnny . . didn't I beg you to be quiet?—now you've waked him."

"Waked—?" I began the question, fixed to the spot in astonishment, knowing the answer before I asked—"waked whom?—Jordan, Turner Jordan? . . you can't mean he's in there?"

"Yes, it's Turner . . and you've waked him . . he's asked me who it is in the flat, calling for me. . .

"I, I said it was you—outside—in the hall—calling——"

She was speaking in whispered panic, "I urged him to go back to sleep again, while I sent you away!" Before I could push her off, she seized the front of my coat with both hands, kissing me placatively with her little, red mouth . . small, wet, placative, sucking kisses. . .

"—While YOU SENT ME AWAY?" I shouted, hoarse.

"O, please! please!—come back into the room where the couch is," closing softly both doors, one after the other, fearful,—the kitchen door and the door of the sitting-room, where our couch waited. . .

. . . . . .

"Look here, Valery, you're double-crossing me, aren't you? Be honest about it!—ostensibly taking me in to help you through the lonesome period while you're getting rid of that—fellow . . but keeping both of us . . *double-crossing* both of us?"

"I wouldn't have gotten involved with you if I hadn't expected you'd break from Jordan and take me as your man . . solely. . ."

"O, you don't realize what a woman of kind heart can be up against . . with a man who won't take 'no' . . I know it looks bad

. . . please don't raise your voice . . please be calm for a moment, and let me explain."

"If you *can* explain!"

Breathlessly——

"He came here, sick; he cried outside the door, wailed for me, like a sick child . . he fell down there, outside, against the door, his head banging hard. . .

"I went out, helped him in, all limp . . what else was there to do?—it was three o'clock in the morning . . I put him to bed. . .

"I think it's acute appendicitis he has; I've been putting ice there on his belly all night——"

"Why don't you send for a doctor?" I queried scornfully.

"He won't have a doctor."

"Right enough he won't have a doctor—the rotten faker! He's stalling . . he's no more sick than I am."

"I tell you he is sick, very sick."

A far voice lifting, in an angry, babyish wail——

"Valery—Valery—come here! . . who is it you have in the other room with you?"—faint, but distinct.

Valery, calling,—opening one of the doors—"wait a minute, Turner,—I'm coming, in just a minute!"

She shuttled swiftly to the bedroom . . came back as swiftly . . swishing rapidly and softly in her long gown of trailing silk, looking pale and lovely like old ivory . . little pink spots of excitement in each cheek . . she breathing quickly. . .

"What's he calling out?" I could hear a confused rumble . . Valery, drawing the door tight to shut out the meaning of the words——

"He knows it's you . . he's cursing about you, becoming all excited and worked-up—I'm afraid, Johnny, that it will make his appendix, or whatever's wrong with him—worse!"

"Cursing about me, is he?" I began to curse, too; "let me get at the bum and we'll find out how sick he is!" I started toward the bedroom, she, clinging to me in terror, I, dragging her with me. . .

"Don't go in there, please . . he's sick—a very sick man!"

"—a dirty faker!"

My angers never last long. My fury was gone, though, momentarily, it had been great. Now I kept the simulation of it going, in

order to learn surely, by the way she tried to protect him, whether he was her lover still. . .

"O, no! he's not a faker! O, dear God!" as I floundered forward, carrying her with me, catching my feet in her long robe, gladly hearing it tear——

"O, please don't hurt him! he's not faking!"

She had desperately fallen down, and was clutching me about the knees, like a football player.

"Valery"—I stopped short—"tell me the solemn truth, this once!"

She had stumbled up to her feet again. I caught her roughly, as she panted with fright, by the shoulders that were flesh-hot through her thin clothes——

"Valery—he hasn't been too sick—to?—" my voice sank lower "to claim you—you know what I mean—since this morning, at three o'clock?—has he?" She tried to sink her warm face into my neck—thrilling me with the touch of her skin as if it stung——

I shoved her back roughly, held her off.

Falteringly she lowered her eyelashes till I could not see into her faint-slanted almond eyes . . her face paled, the pink spots of excitement ebbing. . .

"You better answer me, or I'll make the biggest row you ever saw, you—bitch!"

"No, Johnny . . he hasn't been—too sick—for—for—THAT!" she whispered, faint, the very life ebbing out of her. . .

I held her up till she recovered herself. . .

"Then—Valery—good-by—and forever good-by—I'm never coming here to see you again . . and—and I'm sorry I called you that name—no, don't kiss."

"Don't be angry. Please try to understand . . just a hand-shake—be still, my friend! . ."

Her hand lapsed into mine, moist and small—I hastily flung it off . . from my hand, from my sleeve, where it lapsed again. . .

"Yes, by God! I'm through!"——

"And tell that *bastard* in there, THIS! there's one thing John Gregory's never done—he's never whined or pretended he's sick, to play on a woman's sympathy." This I shouted reverberatingly that Turner Jordan might hear it fully. (I had whined to a woman—to Opal; but it was true I'd never played sick to win one.)

I slammed the door of Valery Malkan's flat and strode away—carrying off vindictively with me, the book on Cubism—Turner Jordan's book.

. . . . . .

Another period of ghastly loneliness and of obscure, inner reproach against myself for not having remained strong-willed enough (as I never did) to be willing to wait,—years, if necessary—for the coming of the One Woman—the pretty, red-headed woman I was thinking of day and night.

And now once more I swore I would stay celibate till the right one came to me. But I knew all the while, according to my man's nature, I would go on having affairs, meeting yet other amatory frustrations. . .

The unwelcome thought sat at the threshold of my mind, that I might, too, if I didn't watch out, chance to be involved in a vexing and trivial affair—just at the time my Ideal walked by "her very footstep showing the goddess" . . and, cluttered with the lesser woman, I would be unable to catch up, as it were, till the ironic processes of life had swept the One Woman forever beyond my hands.

Yet another thought:

As for waiting, celibate and clear of emotional disturbance, till the one dreamed of—the right one—came!

Did not going without women take away from a man that very magnetism that drew women to him?

. . . . . .

Frank Grayson compared every man's predicament in life with that of Robinson Crusoe cast up on his island——

"Well, here am I, for instance,—I, Frank Grayson—shipwrecked into life, whether I will it or not: now let's see what I have immediately at hand to work with. Metaphorically speaking, if I have no tools, nor iron to make tools out of, then I must take, to build a shelter for myself, the thing nearest at hand; for a hatchet, the sharpest stone I can find . . for food, where there are no beefsteaks, —yams, and fish, and shellfish along the reef.

"But by this I don't mean to govern my life by mere opportunism; I don't mean that I'm not for the betterment of things—I AM, just as much as the rest of you are," continued the master

electrician, "but a fellow's got to begin somewhere; and he's got to begin with what he has first at hand, or nowhere!

"O, yes, I perceive clearly the danger of accepting things—imperfect things,—as they are—as my Robinson Crusoe philosophy entails——

"But doesn't every sound doctrine entail its danger?"

At times Grayson would in jesting seriousness carry the simile further, calling Graysaxe "Selkirk"——

"Say, Johnny, don't fail to let me know any time you're utterly down on your luck, and I'll turn 'Selkirk' over to you as long as you need the place . . especially when you settle down to a masterpiece."

"—Guess you think I'm an awful bum, don't you, Frank?"

"No, I don't. I think you're doing the right thing, even when you are shaken with misgiving that you're not . . there's something bigger going on inside you than you're yet aware of, that will keep you hewing true to the line of creator.

"Why should you hold a job for an hour or a day?——

"That's the trouble with so many of our crowd; they're half-time people; writing, painting, acting, when they can; working when they must.

"If they succeed at doing two things at once, there's a certain muscularity about their success; like bare-back riding, standing on two horses, going round and round to the blare of a circus band."

He scratched his head thoughtfully——

"Of course you'll continue to get the pants bawled off of you, behind your back, for holding out, as you do!"

"You believe in what Christ said about the impossibility of serving two masters, then?"

"Yes, I do," he answered—then—forcefully—"they say 'a man must live'—Christ never said 'a man must live'; neither did Socrates."

. . . . . .

My friends, the young journalists and magazine writers whom I knew, over on Gramercy Square; these boys, they talked and talked of the big prices this and that writer they knew had received for articles and short stories . . five cents a word was their goal . .

of course Barrie had received as high as a dollar a word and Kipling, too. Compared to them, Jack London was a piker, when it came to rate per word!

"The Market"——

You would have thought, as a matter of course, they meant Wall Street by the use of that word,—if they had not prefixed the adjective "literary"—"The Literary Market."

"Kick," "Punch," "Wallop"—no, not a discussion of football nor the prize-ring: these were words descriptive of the prime quality each story must possess. Also, there must be a series of "plants" —which, again, had nothing to do with the criminal world, but meant clever items and incidents tucked adroitly away in different crannies of the story, the referring back to which, with feigned naturalness, was to take the reader with complete surprise later on. . .

The young men listened with awe to the dicta of various editors and what they wanted:

"—Guess they have their ears pretty close to the ground—know what the Public wants—or they wouldn't hold their jobs very long!"

They followed closely a trade-magazine of the writers' craft; a special magazine for the commercial writer, as plumbers have their special magazine, and soda-fountain men, theirs.

Another group of these boys who commercialized writing like the selling of drygoods and groceries lived uptown in one of the fairly expensive Broadway Hotels. . .

O. Henry was the god of both these groups . . they spoke of him worshipfully.

They bowed low before the shrine of his careful, moral vulgarity; he boasted, you know, that not one of his characters ever used an objectionable word, that his stories were "clean"—his odd argument being that there was enough ugliness and evil in life without introducing it into literature!

At the same time he was touted both as a great literary man and a truthful interpreter of life. . .

"He has all the fidelity to life of a Maupassant, with none of Maupassant's immorality!"

"Yes, fellows; the Y.M.C.A. Maupassant, Oswald Villard dubbed him rather wittily."

"Darn you, Johnny, you're too cynical, that's what's the matter with you. . ."

"Look here!" I said to them repeatedly, "Literature doesn't consist in a series of tricks played on the reader—factitious, contrived surprises hidden away in ambushes of cleverly arranged words —traps to be sprung on the unsophisticated. . .

"And plot—plot is an extraneous affair. Life should be the only plot, as it is the only body, of Literature!"

. . . . . .

Despite their embittered fulminations to the contrary, these young writers, in their secret hearts, believed as I did, concerning Writing.

Though I liked them, despite their not "belonging,"—I was ill-at-ease with them. . .

Hence I seldom visited them unless I was utterly at a loss for other companionship, or longed for a battle of words . . or when I needed a couple of dollars.

Once one of them gave me a silk shirt——

"Here, Gregory, you can look swell in this all the time . . but you don't rub this kind of shirt when you wash it; you just rinse and squeeze it out, in luke-warm water. . ."

Each of them went with girls that they took regularly to the theater and out to dinner.

I went with them, sometimes,—making a third party—and warned seriously by them that I must observe the regarded proprieties: they had a lurking, uneasy suspicion that I was a wild one.

This suspicion I weakly encouraged by not being wholly displeased by it, despite my disgust at the moral viewpoint of the average.

. . . . . .

The life-panic. It comes not only upon people in lonely forests, as the ancients taught. It comes worst of all, stepping up close from Nowhere,—in the quiet of your room, in the stillness of the night.

When you are all alone, and realizing yourself all alone on this dust-mote, this shining atom we call the world, that swings unsustained but by process of falling, in the midst of an enormous, alien universe . . the conviction that not only the earth, but other worlds in space are also crowded with decillions of beings, each, also, de-

spite their innumerability,—unutterably alone—this increases instead of decreasing your solitariness! . .

And then you feel how good it would be to creep along the line of the general run of your kind, whether you cavil at their ways and beliefs or not! Here is the warmth of fellow-contact, at least—diminishing somewhat the solitariness ever abiding in the secret places of the soul!

My hallucination was often that life was drawing back its tides from me, that I was being left, a shattered thing—far up, dry. . .

"Wouldn't it be better, after all, to get a job, Johnny!" I asked myself.

Then I laughed grimly at the idea of my fitting in anywhere, in any regular position.

My friends the commercial writers—really nice boys that made comfortable livings writing under editorial supervision——

I envied them in the respect that they could command course dinners in hotels whenever they wished; could have their laundry regularly, ironed smooth, each shirt folded and pinned, and held with a paper band; could wear socks without holes in them.

There's nothing meaner to the consciousness than to feel a great toe sticking through a hole in your sock——

. . . . . .

"How badly you look this morning—have you been on a bat?"

"Not a bit of it, Gilbert; I haven't been able to sleep, that's all."

"—Worrying?"

"Somewhat."

"What you need is a job that won't tie you down . . work that's at the same time congenial."

"There are no such jobs. . ."

Gilbert Canning was editor of a new magazine that had just been started, by a group of revolutionary writers and painters . . by people most of whom I knew. I had been to several board meetings of the magazine, where Halton Mann had taken a prominent part in shaping the policy of the periodical in an active, militant sense. . .

Canning was offering me the job of assistant editor . . with his slow assured smile.

He was tall, negligently graceful in his carriage, handsome,—had large brown eyes.

"One week out of every month,—that will be all the time you'll actually need to put in"—again the slow, assured smile, "and you'll get a salary of sixty dollars a month."

I was at his house.

"Here's your first batch of manuscript. Take it away over the week-end, and report on it by Monday or Tuesday."

The mass of envelopes and papers was in my hands before I knew it. By the gesture of taking them I had accepted the job.

. . . . . .

I ran out to Graysaxe on Grayson's commutation book. Grayson was not to be there. I would have complete solitude in which to do my first editorial work.

"All I ask of you is to sift out the impossible stuff—leave the rest that has any thought or interest in it, for my decision and that of the Board."

I never felt so important in my life as when I sat down before the roaring wood fire I'd made, a pot of coffee beside me, the table cluttered with possible contributions for "The Proletarian."

I took up the first manuscript. It was a poem. A very bad poem. I put it aside. The writer didn't know how to spell or punctuate. He didn't know the first rules of versification.

The next manuscript was a short story . . all about the woes of a worker in a factory in the Middle West . . the woes of the other workers, too—the abuses they were subjected to, by a demoniac employer . . the workers in the story were paragons of virtue, brotherly love, intelligence . . their employer and his bosses, brutal, ignorant slave-drivers, criminals in every instance.

Other stories followed, all of the same cast.

If it were true, I thought, that employers and capitalists were as unintelligent as they are depicted in these stories, and the workers, as pure of intent and mighty of spirit—there would be no need for a revolution—it would have come already!

Here and there a sturdy bit of creation thrust up . . and a poem of power based on first-hand observation and feeling; a story or article that handled its theme competently . . but most of the contributions to "The Proletarian" were wretched and discouraging.

How dared these people write, in utter ignorance of literature when they wouldn't presume to offer themselves as expert bricklayers or carpenters, without months of hard apprenticeship?

The wrenching and tearing of divided purpose began within me. I revolted against reading this truck, sifting it through further for the one good bit of prose or verse that waited, here and there; animated, it was true, with thrusts of fierce, bitter energy, and, at times, greatness.

I forecast that "The Proletarian" would help, on the whole, many artists and writers to find themselves, and strike their own gait afterward. . .

But—was this my job?—to give of my creative energy in this way?

I shoved the heap of manuscript to the floor. I couldn't go ahead with it. Regretfully, I saw the last glimmer of the sixty dollars a months departing.

I caught up Milton's *Paradise Lost* and read page after page of sure, sublime melody to counterbalance the effect of the stuff with which I had been infesting my thought.

I hurried back to town, to have it over. I tied the entire batch of manuscript into a bundle with a bit of cord.

Tiptoeing up to Gilbert Canning's door, my heart palpitant from the fear that I might run into him yet,—I hung, with a loop in the string, the mass of poetry and prose on his door-knob, and I fled—leaving a brief note:

"Dear Gilbert:

"After all I have made up my mind to live and die for poetry.

"John Gregory."

I knew instantly that, when I wrote the phrase "live and die for poetry" I was letting myself in for being the possible butt of a jest-about-town. But I meant it,—why not write it? . .

Several times I tiptoed softly back, irresolute and changing my mind, meaning gently to lift off the stuff and go through with the work after all; but, each time, tiptoeing as softly away, changing my mind back to its first resolve.

. . . . . .

At the next meeting of the Editorial Board of "The Proletarian,"

I was received with quiet smiles, but, beyond an easy-going thrust or two, Gilbert Canning did not bait me as he might have. . .

Though, afterward I learned, he had legitimately retailed abroad the story of my living and dying for poetry—as rather good!

Yet why should it be considered ridiculous for a fellow named John Gregory to live and die for poetry—and not, for Chatterton, Keats, Shelley, Leopardi, Chenier to do so?

. . . . . .

Shortly after my rapid resignation, Shenley Frere, a young literary man from Chicago, took up where I left off. He filled the place as assistant editor perfectly. I still remained on the staff of editorial contributors to "The Proletarian."

"We can use bits of your verse that no one else will buy—those occasional bits where you really hit it off!" said Canning.

"Here's one that's been rejected by ten magazines":

"RESURRECTION

"I hope there is a resurrection day
For bodies, as the grey-beard prophets say,
When Helen's naked limbs again will gleam
Regathered from the dust of death's long dream,
And all the olden beauties, being fair,
Will take the watching angels unaware
And make God's heavenly meadows doubly sweet
With rosy vagrancy of little feet."

"With rosy vagrancy of little feet"—Canning repeated the last line, smacking his lips over it, as if tasting—"that's fine, especially,—but I can easily see why everybody's rejected this—it represents all the famous courtesans of history coming into heaven, naked, among the saints!"

"I have found," I commented, "that the conventional magazines stand more for out-spokenness in prose than in verse."

"Which shows the power verse yet can be in the world—we can use all you've got as good as 'Resurrection,' and pay you a little for it, too, even if it has nothing to do with the Revolution."

There was also a sonnet on Zenobia led in triumph, through the Roman crowds, by Cæsar—that Canning took:

Cæsar in triumphal procession, back from the East: captive kings led by the neck, behind; chariots heaped with glitter of pillage; legion on sun-black legion swinging by, banners billowing, trumpets crying—last;

> *"Zenobia, naked and imperial, comes,*
> *With gold chains chiming at her hands and feet—*
> *Her kingdoms overthrown, herself a prize,*
> *But no capitulation in her eyes!"*

The verse I submitted that held any revolutionary content was not good: there was one beginning—"I'm glad I'm not a gentleman" that was wretched; my Ode to Shelley was good radical verse, and an exception.

My parody of Whitman was good foolery: beginning "I have hair on my chest like a haystack!"

For we of "The Proletarian" were not too utterly solemn over the Cause.

There was one cartoon, notably, satirizing certain of the so-called proponents of Radicalism—depicting two men seated at a table in the backroom of a saloon; the men were reeling, head over arms, full of drink; a glass that their sprawling arms had knocked over, lay on its side, spilling a splash of beer along the table and down to the floor . . that cartoon was legended—"Yours for the Revolution!"

. . . . . .

Ally Merton was trotting me around to meet Xavier Lawrence Anson, the celebrated columnist and translator of Horace and the Latin Amorists, Catullus and Tibullus.

X.L.A., as he signed himself, had a cachet of the Literary about him. His style of humor was not the crude knock-'em-down-and-drag-'em-out style customary to the average newspaper reader. There was more delicacy, more adroitness to it, more of the fanciful in it.

X.L.A. was not afraid of impinging on the intellectual lest he be called by the stupid word "high brow."

Merton brought me up to Anson's Riverside Drive apartment while the latter and his wife were dallying over a late breakfast.

The quiet, little, unaffected man received me pleasantly. While

I grew self-consciously voluble in his presence because he was a celebrity,—he rendered careful regard to what I was saying with a delicate courtesy that set me finally at ease. Soon we were deep in a discussion of eighteenth century poetry.

But Ally could not leave me unperturbed. He had evidently brought me up there to show me off. He must thrust in an alien question—a personal one—following his customary procedure——

"Where's Hildreth Baxter these days?" he asked, not pertinently.

I was taken aback. I began to stammer.

"Why, Ally,—you oughtn't to—embarrass Mr. Gregory—we're strangers to him, and—" X.L.A. was moved to protest, noting the confusion in my face.

"O, he likes it, or I wouldn't do it! You don't know him!"—Merton.

I was grateful to X.L.A. for accepting me at my highest mode, but Merton was somewhat right in his cynically friendly appraisal of me.

In the midst of my embarrassment and confusion I secretly liked being made a brazen sensation of, took a vulgar yet ashamed delight in it; at the same time despising and disliking myself intensely for the weakness. . .

Yet here was X.L.A. on our very first meeting, by a single palpation of instinct, adequately sensing the inner currents of my spirit in a fashion that Merton, in spite of all his exterior suavity and tact, had never done!—with all his intimate knowledge of my life!

. . . . . .

I have no right, however, to blame Merton for accepting, and appraising me to others, on the external value I apparently set upon myself. Evidently I preened myself on my past notoriety, expanding my peacock's tail of egotism at any mention of it.

But why could he not have seen deeper into me, as X.L.A. had straightway done?

. . . . . .

Merton could not know the suffering I went through lying awake at night—when I frequently slipped to my knees, extending my palms outward, like a Greek, in prayer, not locking my fists together like a Methodist—slipped to my knees and prayed burningly to what

I called "the spirits of beauty and shapes of loveliness" to come into me, cleanse the noise out of my life, put the music of their assured quietness there, instead . . so helping me to go on to being truly great!

. . . . . .

"Well, here you are again, Johnny," observed Janice, with her slow drawl—sarcastically—"I always know," she continued, "when you're in the midst of a successful affair . . then you almost never come to visit me . . but, when you're restless again, again driven about by the œstrus of sex, I can surely count on seeing you frequently."

"Why, Janice!—" I began to obtest. . .

"It must be awful, being a man!"

. . . . . .

Janice was right. It was awful, being a man. The hot, surging blood pulsing full and painful within me, as if constrained to the bursting point, by abstinence; the hurting fullness in my veins and nerves beating blindly to escape, to find avenues of ease! . .

About and around and about on the continual, hopeless quest I whirled, seeking, in every group I knew, a woman's intimate companionship . . running hectically to parties . . drinking, debating, philandering, reading aloud my latest poems; enduring the companionship of people whom I did not even like—all to alleviate the misery of my solitariness,—to find, perhaps this time, in some woman, more than a passing affair . . a woman, rather, who would mean enough to me, to hold me to more than the temporary; to find, at last, the beautiful, golden-haired creature that obsessed the dreams of all my imagination!

Every time I heard of a new girl coming to our group—to the Village—"this girl might be the one!" and I would hurry to find her, to attempt her.

Often and often I cursed my poverty.

. . . . . .

Damn this nonsensical talk about the uselessness of money, mostly indulged in enviously by those who had little of it.

Money could buy a lot of things—freedom to live as you wished, for one thing! provided you had the accompanying imagination to

use that freedom; and love—if it couldn't buy love, at least it might put a man in the way of it!

. . . . . .

Wasn't I the fool to have chucked up the assistant editorship of "The Proletarian"?

I was deeply in debt again, to Mrs. Nough and to Daddy Trotter.

I would have to do something, if only to cure by hard occupation this consuming restlessness. . .

How about shipping to sea again?—I asked myself.

But it was in vain that I strove to redintegrate the roving spirit of the days of my youth . . resolving that I would go to sea as I had done then. For now I foresaw too well that close and forced companionship within the exiguous space of a ship would at present be spiritual and mental sickness to me, in spite of the limitless horizons—in such conditions their very limitlessness a mockery.

And I knew that strange ports, for the common sailor, too often resolved themselves into dirty quays and docks.

. . . . . .

I found a way out.

Bennett Whellen would take another narrative poem from me for the "Agora."

"Don't be so sensitive: it's no shame, being a disciple of Masefield."

I outlined a poem to him—"Jail." He would pay me eighty dollars for it; but this time, steadfastly, he refused an advance—"bring in the poem, and then I'll hand over the money; but not a cent till then."

"But, unless you advance me a few dollars"——

"Sell a poem to Jack Miles, if you're broke."

"I haven't had an inspiration for a lyric, for days."

But Whellen was obdurate.

"The only way to drag work out of you, I've learned, is to leave you on your uppers."

It was my good friend, Hartley Danforth, who tided me over, by having me out to his house, on the Long Island shore.

"You're right; you'd be a fool to go to sea again. That belongs to the Past. Never repeat yourself . . that's the secret of spiritual growth!"

Danforth brought me back from New York with him.

. . . . . .

Up the long gravel walk we passed, skirting three baby carriages containing children of Danforth's . . nursemaids fluttering about. . .

It was a joke among the Radicals, the steady additions to the Danforth family.

"The Danforths go in for the old-fashioned family."

"Yes, if Teddy ever becomes the First Consul of The Republic we can use Hartley Danforth at Court to represent us."

"Suppose he'd go in for naming his children as the Puritans named theirs, or as the parents of some of the children up at the Fernando School?"

"In the first place, he'd be strictly sociological, strictly scientific, in his naming—there would be Syndicalism Danforth, Direct-Action Danforth, Sabotage Danforth!"

During the three weeks that I stayed at the Danforths' place I finished "Jail"—it was bitter like Gorky, rhymed.

. . . . . .

Two of the Danforth children were old enough to listen to stories. I invented rambling stories and fables for them. One was something about Reynard the Fox that dug into the underground village of the gnomes to eat them up—to drink the dainty, earth-tasting blood from their bodies. . .

"What are gnomes?" little serious Selina asked.

"Strange, brown pigmy men in green breeches that dwell under the ground where the roots of trees go."

"But I don't want the fox to eat them!" protested Selina, tears brimming the wideness of her pretty, blue eyes.

"—The gnomes are bad sometimes!"—awkwardly trying to extricate myself.

"It doesn't matter how bad they are; I want them to live!" Selina rocked her tiny body in bitter grief, weeping violently. Her smaller sister Wilhelmina following sympathetic suit.

I was appalled at the unforeseen effect of my fable. The sly Fox's catching and devouring of the gnomes had been but an incident in a long, involved narrative.

"Don't cry, Selina—Wilhelmina! I know a big eagle 'way up in

the sky. I will have him swoop down, quick, and seize the Fox, and punish him!"

But I got off wrong again.

"No! No! No!" pleaded the elder sister tearfully and vehemently, "we don't want the poor Fox punished neither . . even if he has done bad things . . nobody must be hurt or punished at all!"

. . . . . .

Julia Danforth, Hartley's wife,—round-faced, intense, but gentle to the core—she rebuked me in earnest mildness——

"What's this story you've been telling Selina and Wilhelmina?

"Selina cried herself to sleep last night 'because the eagle punished the fox,' and little Wilhelmina stayed awake, wide-eyed, nervous—her behavior when she has been subjected to extreme fright——"

And Hartley interposed his protest,—grey-faced, and in a mode more serious.

"Look here, Johnny," compressing his flexible lips firmly, "after this, if you must tell the children stories, don't make up fairy tales for them . . and cut out the old myths about gods and goddesses . . can't you tell them, instead, of the wonders of Natural History, the marvels of Science?—facts that appeal better to the true imagination than all the foolish myths belonging to the childhood of the mind. . .

"I, for one, am making an effort to bring up my offspring without having their heads stuffed full of trash about fairies, gods, religion——

"Whenever I come upon a nurse talking God to them—I fire her if she won't learn to mind her business—once a Catholic nurse sneaked over a few prayers—had my children praying to the Virgin Mary—she left quick enough——

"I'll fight to a finish for my right to keep these children of mine mentally incorrupt till they're old enough to think for themselves. . .

"After that, what they think and believe's their own precious business!"

"But, Hartley," I protested, "in keeping them from fairy tales, from mythology, and folklore—from the common inheritance of the world's imagination——

"Don't you think you're subjecting them to the opposite danger

of being transformed into bigots of materialism?—swamping them in 'thing-mindedness' as Janice Godman phrases it?"

"Not at all!" Hartley Danforth snapped up decisively,—"I refuse to let them be turned into foolish-minded day-dreamers in wrong directions, superstitious cowards, for their mature life, just because a poet seeks to exercise his fancy on them, in an lazy off-hour, or because an ignorant nurse-maid wishes to bring them to the blind credulity of her ignorant forefathers!"

To show there was no ill-will meant, Danforth put his hand firmly, but in a friendly manner, on my shoulder— "Come, my boy,—let's go for a walk before dinner . . I'm sorry if I've been too—emphatic!"

. . . . . .

Whellen promptly wrote me my check for eighty dollars.

"I was right!" he smiled, appreciative of his astuteness, "I've learned how to handle you, Mr. Poet!

"Don't go blowing this in all at once!

"Perhaps you'd better let me mail you ten a week, for eight weeks?"

I grasped the check quickly from his hand.

"I need some clothes badly."

. . . . . .

Danforth had offered me a job as his amanuensis and secretary . . sixty dollars a month, board and room. He needed an intelligent helper. He was writing a book on Tolstoy, whom he had visited while in Russia.

Living with the Danforths was breathing the very mountain air of the mind and spirit. Theirs was the ideal life for ordered intelligence and interest in all things intellectual . . I refused the work, however.

"You understand, Hartley; I must be absolutely free."

"You'd have much time to yourself," Mary Wyndham, Julia Danforth's unmarried sister, urged . . Mary Wyndham, sharp-minded and inquisitive, also a writer—given to historical research—"Hartley wouldn't work you hard."

"Mary—I can't . . you understand, don't you? . .

"Only the other day I turned down a job as assistant editor of "The Proletarian"——

"Yes—I've heard the joke about 'living and dying for poetry.'

"If suave Gilbert Canning couldn't entrap you into what was good for you, no one else could. . . Canning, who, if sent as plenipotentiary of The Free Thinkers' Society,—could persuade the Pope himself of the necessity of atheism!"

"Then you—understand?"

"I understand that you're either extremely lazy or a genius!" she answered, smiling pleasantly to take the bite from her appraisal.

. . . . . .

Ally Merton must see my new suit—that he had not donated, but that I had bought, *myself*.

"They stuck you. Why in God's name didn't you call me up and have me show you where to go for a cheap suit that would, at the same time, be made of more than shoddy?"

"It's not shoddy."

"Wait till you're caught out in the first rain; it'll hang on you like soaked cardboard; you might as well have thrown your money in a wad down the sewer."

Crestfallen, I was about to depart. I refused to stay for dinner at the Fraternity House, self-conscious over the suit I had come there in full pride to show.

Merton walked down the block with me.

"—come back, chuck that suit, or else keep it for indoors. Let me give you one of my own." There was pity and sympathy in his voice, no simper of that amusement on his lips with which he often greeted me.

"Ally, I think you're really my friend. But I can't take anything more from you."

"What's the matter now?"

"—Because, because you—offended me grossly at X.L.A.'s, the other morning, talking about my intimate life in front of him, when I'd just met him."

Merton wrinkled his forehead horizontally, turning his vague, blue eyes on me in puzzlement——

"I thought you liked that—or I wouldn't have done it."

"You don't treat your other friends so."

"But, you act differently—don't seem to mind—say things about

yourself that startle—I never thought you so sensitive—" he mumbled, humbly apologetic.

"I AM—frightly sensitive!"

"I'm genuinely sorry, Johnny."

I could see he was sorry—and puzzled.

"But I thought you liked to be showed off."

"Silly enough,—I do! yet God, how I also hate it!"

. . . . . .

My furies against rudeness that I had myself called forth from people, by horseplay and vociferous awkwardness—seldom would I resent an affront on the instant it was given . . at which time verbal assault and injury need facing, if ever.

No,—but days after, I would run into the one who had been rude to me, on the street, or in some friend's apartment . . when I would blaze forth some frightful, seemingly irrelevant insult—retaliating belatedly to an incident oftener forgotten than remembered. . .

Or, in the midst of an abstract discussion, I would send forth an arrow of personal bitterness that would strike the entire company into surprised silence . . when my puzzled, erstwhile opponent had long forgotten the original affront——

This behavior brought me a reputation for pointless violence and unthinking rudeness.

"You're strange, Johnny"—Merton expatiated—"things I'd offer to kill a man for, you easily let pass . . sometimes you don't see a deliberate insult . . at other times, you jump down a fellow's throat, when he means no offense in the world—I give up!" and he threw up his hands imitative of the gesture Mackworth, the novelist, used, back in Kansas, when he'd call me "an interstellar tramp."

. . . . . .

Importantly I paid Trotter some on what I owed him for food. And I tendered a few weeks' rent to Mrs. Nough.

. . . . . .

At the Fernando School Morgan Wace was the presiding spirit. Of a wealthy, conservative, famous family—he had gone valiantly Radical, outspokenly "Red." There was a simple dignity about his casting his lot in with anarchism because of which no one in the world could doubt his sincerity.

In a worldly sense he had lost everything through his actions,

as the case was to be with Halton Mann later on. But, as with Halton Mann, it bothered others much more than it did him. Wace's uncle, the Bishop, was troubled exceedingly by his nephew's course of life; though the whiteness of it shone as clean as that of any saint.

Wace beamed in his high, cloudy manner, with his pale, bulging, Coleridgian brow—over Penton Baxter's attack on his uncle, when the latter had declared in his magazine, "The Vista," something to the effect that when Christ had pronounced his words about laying up treasures where moths do not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal—the Saviour had hinted, as well, at safety deposit boxes and the gilt-edged securities of the Universal Oil magnates.

. . . . . .

Wace was lecturing, leaning above us across the table on the platform, in the lecture room of The Fernando Center—his discourse was on the poetry of a new poet he had discovered and given several pages to, in the magazine of which he was editor—"Literature."

The poet was Bruce Otter, a member of the Fernando School or Center, and a protégé of Wace's. . .

There was but one poem of Otter's that Wace quoted, that I thought tolerable—the one of few lines which described three nuns walking along the street, like three upright coffins. . .

As Wace went on and on in his mounting enthusiasm, my mind strayed back to thoughts of primitive Christianity; these people at the Fernando Center, resembled, in many respects, the early Christians . . theirs was the same fervor, the same certainty as to their having the one mode of saving the world, the same quaint simplicity in facing the practical, more involved aspects of life.

Jules Fernando, the Revolutionist, and founder of The Fernando Centers and Schools through the world,—he had been stood up against the wall and shot—he was their Christ . . shot instead of crucified. . .

Thinking thus while Wace was speaking, the questing of my heart and the hunger of my sex had sent my eyes roving over the women of the assemblage. . .

Many of them were good-looking; not beautiful, of course; Opal had been the only beautiful one among them; she seemed to have quit the Group . . no doubt staying south to be with the young

shipyard mechanic who had won out over me. I knew it was rotten of me, but a surge of hatred rose in me at the thought of her and him; hatred the greater because both of them had shown up finer in Radical behavior than I had. . .

No, Lily, Morgan Wace's sweetheart, she was another of the Fernando Center women who was beautiful! there she sat, drinking in her lover's lecture, all a lambent glow of beauty and white enthusiasm, fitting the flower she was named after. . .

Not three seats from me sat a girl I had never seen before; a stoutish girl whose face was olive-pretty . . again I thought of Opal . . her face favored Opal's slightly.

Rows of buttons went innumerously up and down this girl's faded green dress . . buttons marching up over her shoulders and down her back, and lending adroit outline to her form, rendering her plumpness less. . .

It was the rows of marching buttons that arrested my roving eye and brought them up, at her smallish, olive-pretty face that was not quite in keeping with her size. . .

The talk over, we gathered about Wace, the Girl With the Buttons coming foreward by my side, meeting my hot gaze with a weakish, tentative smile.

"Morgan Wace, you're a great appreciator, but a pretty bad critic," I began, "those poems of Otter's that you quoted—all of them were the worst possible, except that one about the three nuns going along the street like three animated coffins on end,—but it takes more than one arresting simile to make a good poem—as most of the Free Verse writers have yet to learn."

"But, Gregory, we should give people a chance, when they first start out in the practice of poetry, instead of holding aloof till they've succeeded, or, rather, been killed off by neglect."

"—But that's not done by proclaiming from the housetops,—from inadequate warrant of a few arresting similes—that they're already equals of Whitman and Swinburne, as you've just done, regarding Otter."

Wace, glowing with enthusiasm, defended Otter's poetry . . the Girl With the Buttons agreed with him. . . Otter himself slid up softly, not belying his name. Otter looked strong, glistening like a

healthy animal. Entire animal sensuality, the mainspring of his life —I read it in his face, in his bodily bearing.

"You don't like my poetry I hear?" he was speaking to me.

"Otter, I think it dreadful!" There was now more than the direct impersonal frankness of the critic back of what I said; though it was the first time I had set eyes on The Girl With the Buttons, I was jealous of her having sided with Otter during my argument with Morgan Wace over Otter's verse, and I was also jealous of Otter's obviously similar intent toward her. I lit into him, under cover of further criticism of his work.

Just when I thought he was about to take personally my literary castigation, he smiled on me evenly through his close-clipped beard; the smile flickered on lips carmine-red . . their natural color, it was not rouge . . a shining animal smile through which gleamed even, strong, animal teeth. . .

I grasped his outstretched hand shoved into mine,—unenthusiastically. . .

"After all," he observed, "it's only a difference of individual opinion."

I would not let him get away with such an untrue statement.

"On the contrary, Otter,—there happen to subsist quite definite literary criteria to go by. . ."

Still more jealousy: I believe I was also jealous of the attention showered on him as a poet!

. . . . . .

Otter and I, the meeting dispersed, crowded Sarah Bleimant (the name of the Girl With the Buttons)—into a corner, eagerly and directly, each attempting her capture. . .

Aiming scarcely concealed, fiercely personal animus indirectly at each other, we talked AT Sarah,—I, of regular poetry; Otter of Free Verse, and of the Futuristic sculpture of which he was also a practitioner.

"By the way, Sarah, you certainly have a fine bust for sculpture." Otter boldly moved his strong, reddish-haired hands over her swelling bodice soldiered with ranks of buttons.

She must have FELT the heat of his hands, the hot animalism of them. For, though she shrank back from him, a silly look of pleasure and fright showed in her face.

I perceived quickly that much of her shrinking was because of my noting eye. I saw that, if I did not take care, Otter's greater boldness would win out over me.

It would all be according to which of us saw her most, the first few times.

Undeniably he violently excited the lustiness of the animal in her. At present, the excitation he evoked took the form of pleased semi-repulsion; that repulsion, that, at the next meeting between them, might as readily leap into nympholeptic flame.

Otter employed a bold silliness that the girl did not dislike; he began to enumerate, counting, and pressing in on them, slow, one of her rows of buttons——

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief"—repeating the nursery rhyme.

"Stop being foolish," giggled Sarah, "besides, you're tickling," she protested, half-heartedly thrusting his hand away.

A wave of impetuous anger swept over me——

"Yes, you fool! can't you leave the girl alone?"

"But, Comrade Gregory, I'm taking Comrade Bleimant home, and——"

"Keep your hands off her, I say!" I broke forth violently, seeing that the girl was more attracted to the animal in him than to the animal in me. . .

I practically ran Otter out of the room. It was my luck that, beneath his effrontery, he was a mild fellow.

"Get out! *I'm* taking her home!"

. . . . . .

The simple, good-looking, stoutish Sarah was, like myself, searching for a mate.

With a numb sense of doom—if caught—in my heart, I vaingloried to her over my future as a writer, playing up to her sense of economic security, a sense that every woman owns through centuries of inherited experience, along with her sex-sense and instinct for motherhood.

I skirted about the great, pretty, placid, matriarchal girl . . if she had but closed in upon me under the clutch of her powerful mating instinct, it would have been all over with me.

That sense of doom haunted me that must hover over the male

of the praying mantis—the male of which species runs the hazardous chance of being seized and devoured in the very act of gaining intimate access to the formidable female!

I could see myself being presented faithfully and surely, with one baby after another, by Sarah. . .

Hogarth's cartoon of the poet in his sordid attic lodgings . . babies . . wife . . mother-in-law cluttering about and impeding his literary labors . . himself pale and frantic, dashing off verse upon verse, rhyme upon rhyme, in a frenzied despair—this picture ever hung before my inner eye, while I courted Sarah.

This picture taught me wariness in the midst of a sex-need as consuming as that of the male of the praying mantis.

I think, because of it, I should have abandoned the pursuit, if Otter, slipping close along and pressing warm in the same pursuit, had not spurred me to pride of rivalry.

. . . . . .

Then was a time of increasing stress in the Radical world, and, though she had not as yet perceived it, the rift was beginning to widen between Emma Silverman's idealistic school of anarchy, and the school of the practical, direct-actionistic anarchism that begot syndicalism, the I.W.W. and occasional cases of sporadic, personal violence on the part of a few heady individuals mettlesome with the hot impatience of youth: three of whom happened to belong to Emma Silverman's group. . .

And, God knows, the gross abuses of the big owners practiced against the mill workers of Paterson, Lowell, and Fall River, and against the striking miners in Colorado, were enough to goad Radicals who held any life in them, to extreme action in retaliation.

Laws and the guarantees of the Constitution were, from the first, ruthlessly put aside by the tremendous banded powers of Wealth . . no wonder a few on the side of the workers tore a leaf out of the same book.

. . . . . .

"I do not—never have—advocated violence," I heard Emma Silverman once pronounce in a lecture, "but when you're walking over swampy ground, if you step in one place, the pressure of the foot will cause water to spurt up, in another; just as naturally, violence pressing down from above, in social and economic disputes—

is inevitably answered by violence from below, by mere force of pressure, whether it brings good results or not being beside the question.

"It is natural for any human being who is struck a blow, to return that blow."

. . . . . .

Of the mill strikers, more later!

At present—concerning the striking coal miners!

Stories authentically attested, came to us, of striking miners in Colorado first cast out of their company-owned hovels (that they were forced to rent of the companies, no other places being available). . .

We heard of evicted miners taking to the hillsides, inhabiting tents furnished by friendly groups of other workingmen——

Tents that were no sooner occupied than they were wantonly shot into, by the assembled State militia . . enfiladed and fusilladed into, and riddled through and through causelessly—as if the assembled soldiery of the commonwealth took the whole life-and-death struggle as a savage lark.

Not only the miners, but wives and children of the miners, were wounded, in some cases, it was reported—slain . . !

It is no wonder, I repeat, that an extreme condition of affairs like this should evoke, in response, violence from some of the hotter heads.

Haywood and Big Joe Oakman, St. John and Quinlan and Boyd; Giovannitti and Carlo Tresca and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn were going about organizing, adding fire to fire against the unconstitutional abuses heaped upon, suffered by, the working people.

Penton Baxter, joined by Upton Sinclair, with his sincerity, plus his accurate eye for publicity and spectacular effect, had organized a group that paraded, each day, up and down in front of the Rockefeller offices; the Rockefellers were said to own largely in the mines of the disaffected districts of Colorado. . .

The papers were rife with stories of picketings, of arrests; pamphlets and leaflets were scattered broadcast.

Becky Edelson, courageous as a tiger, delivered speeches that brought her in jeopardy of serious injury. . .

Her face streaming blood from wounds caused by missiles flung

at her by jeering mobs—the box from which she spoke rushed by them and kicked from under her feet——

At Fountain Square in Tarrytown, where folk from the Ferrer School and Fernando Center conducted their agitation against the Capitalist régime of brutality in Colorado.

. . . . . .

"Why should the Rockefellers, whether directly or indirectly involved and responsible for the cruelty and murder practiced on the striking miners out there, be allowed a place of secure refuge, here, in the East where they can retire behind barred gates under the protection of hireling guards and the police forces of their System?"——

To smoke them out, make them uncomfortable by parades, protest, and publicity, in front of their offices, churches, homes,—that was the way to do—we were all agreed—until they were brought to the point of realization that something was radically wrong in their behavior toward mankind!

. . . . . .

Now there were three young men, Carron, Berg and Murphy, who attended lectures and classes at The Ferrer School, and at Fernando Center:

Carron was as dignified as a young Indian chief,—like an Indian, too, in complexion and face . . and it was rumored that he had a strain of Indian blood in him; Berg was a big, hulky, fair-haired Norwegian or Swede—a throw-back to the Viking who stood on the ship's prow, as it advanced shoreward to the foray; Murphy—he was the voluble, whimsical, but really desperate Irish revolutionist. . .

Each of these young men had "gone through the Capitalist mill" —had already suffered much and unfairly under the System's resentment and reprisal for their irrepressible radical utterances and activities——

Arthur Carron had been beaten into a bloody mass till it was a wonder life survived in him—by policemen at a mass meeting held in Union Square; in addition, he claimed, he had been kicked and man-handled while on the way to the station house, while he lay, flat-outstretched on the bottom of the patrol wagon . . his hair and blood had stuck to the clubs they beat him up with——

Berg had lost, through suffering and malnutrition, his mother, wife and child, it was told, during a prolonged strike in a New England mill town when the strikers would not give in—though at last they had to——

It was natural that neither of these two should be sweet-minded toward what was denominated the Capitalist System, on which they blamed directly all their sufferings and woes; it was natural that they should not stop to scrutinize too closely and philosophically the economic history and evolution of civilization——

Of the third, one Murphy, little was known, save that, merry though he was by nature, his eyes flashed fires of determination and angry revolt equal to that of his chosen companions in the secret "work" projected by them.

. . . . . .

"Direct Action," "Sabotage,"—we had played with these words, tossing them up skillfully as jugglers toss skillfully colored balls: these were the concepts being taken up more and more by the young people of the time. . .

How "direct" the "action" was to be, and how mad, the rest of us were soon to be thunder-struck by learning—through a deadly "fluke."

. . . . . .

Up on Lexington Avenue, in the flat of Arthur Carron's sweetheart, a terrible accident took place:

A bomb went off inadvertently and unexpectedly—there—a bomb designed, the papers reported, for Pocantico Hills. . .

. . . . . .

The entire front of the three-story house tumbled and crumbled out, spilling its insides all over the sidewalk and street—slid downward in a cloudy collapse of floors, partitions, beams, ceilings, domestic effects, and dusty, choky plaster. . .

One man was miraculously blown bodily out of a bathtub, unhurt. . .

One woman was slain by flying iron slugs, evidently from the exploded bomb, while she lay sleeping in her bed——

Of the mad Berg scattered portions were found—a bit of him on the car tracks in the street below; another portion on the roof of a neighboring church, the cross of which had, symbolically we

guessed, been blown away; a scalp, torn clean off the skull—blocks distant—was picked up, and finally identified as his. . .

Carron himself, the moving spirit of the plot—was lifted furiously on the unexpected wings of the hurling blast, through the building,—to drape, limp like a dish rag cast away, over the explosion-twisted rails of the fire-escape:

While, utter miracle of all—whole and alive, but whipped naked to the skin like a plucked Thanksgiving turkey—Murphy came to, standing, dazed, on the peaceful sidewalk, three stories below, looking vacantly, and in stunned surprise, up at the devastated heap, that, a red flash before, had stood, a decorous, complete, and well-ordered tenement. . .

There was a detective, off-duty, who lived nearby, and who rushed out, and across.

With an extreme Catholic-Irish sense of decency and kindness, he conducted Murphy to the station house, wrapped in his overcoat—where, through the further kindness of the Force, the lad was fitted out in slack clothes sharked together from contributions of policemen—and then let go! the authorities being yet of the belief that the explosion had been an accidental one connected with the subway-excavation nearby, and must consequently be hushed up and as little said about it as possible. . .

Murphy had whimsically related to them, while they rocked with laughter, how he had slid down with the falling, tilting floors and showering debris, had been dumped out on the sidewalk as from a hopper,—his clothes swiped clean from his body, but himself miraculously and almost without the thread of a thin blood-scratch, red across his flesh,—dumped, safe, on the sidewalk. . .

Murphy's dizzy nonchalance, as well as the Law's belief in a subway accident—which was a thing to be hushed up and condoned—won his release . . on the immediate point of which, no doubt, he had taken freight with all expedition, disappearing forever, henceforth, from search or ken, into the anonymous nowhere of the continent-wide trampdom of America . . thanking the good God for the winning streak of his Irish luck!

It was several days before we, as well as the authorities, realized that it was a bomb, somehow prematurely exploded, that had done the damage; a bomb, in the kitchen of the flat of Carron's sweetheart

—in which flat the three boys had been accustomed to forgather!

. . . . . .

The parading of the more pacific protesters abruptly ceased from in front of 26 Broadway. . .

The Fernando Center and The Ferrer School Groups, while not espousing violence, though admitting the inevitability of it under certain conditions of oppression—they boldly stood by their courageous but misguided younger members.

A public funeral was accorded the body of Carron and the bits left of Berg. . .

The procession marched to Union Square and frank and fearless orations were delivered there by Leonard Abbot, Morgan Wace, Alexander Berkman, Mack Alexander, and other prominent members of New York's Radical groups.

Close about and against them, rows of policemen waited tense, their fingers itching hopefully at every-ready clubs, ready to anticipate the slightest provocation for their use . . provocation which was not given.

. . . . . .

Though Bruce Otter seriously competed with him, it was Adolf Wolf, also a poet-sculptor, who designed and built the urn for the ashes of the young revolutionaries . . a creation of striking design and startling conception—a four-sided pyramid ending in a clenched fist rising over the apex. . .

"The meaning of this," explained Wolf to the newspapermen gathered about him in his studio—"the pyramid,—that means the System pressing down heavier and heavier, from above, on the People, prostrate below!"

"And the clenched fist?"

"—Symbolizes their aroused force, their gathered strength, breaking through!"

. . . . . .

As for myself, I was glad that the individualism in which I was, after all, rooted, had kept me well out of it. I was glad that my one pursuit was, in spite of all deviations from it,—the writing of my poetry, the following of a literary career.

I avowed revolutionary principles, and wrote many poems for the Cause. But inwardly I was not so sure of the innocency of the

proletariat, not so sure of the millennium that would be brought about on earth, through their rising into power. . .

I was not so sure but what, despite its past errors and present abuses,—Capitalism, as a state of society, had been brought about and was still fostered by what every workingman was at heart——

"Capitalism stands solid because, at heart, every worker is a would-be Capitalist——"

I was not so sure but that the régime of the Proletariat, when it had its turn, would not bring upon humanity abuses more atrocious than any that saw day under the present system of exploiters and exploited.

I often disquieted my friends and comrades by my remarks to the aforesaid affect, who were devotees to the dream and hope of a perfect proletarian world.

. . . . . .

For weeks after the "Carron Bomb Outrage" an atmosphere of subdued, solemn excitement quivered about the Fernando Center . . reminding me of the forty-eight-hour hush that fell over the bark "Valkyrie" on which I had gone to Australia, as cabin boy, in my youth—that time one of the sailors went overboard . . jerked loose from the yardarm and cast down into the sea by a great wind in the Dark. . .

After which the activities and duties of seamen's work gradually reclaimed the men to their normal selves. . .

It was weeks before the Fernando Center became its normal self again. . .

And for weeks plainclothes men, easy to be picked cut because of their blue-serge suits and police haircuts, thrust themselves into our group, attending our meetings, wrinkling their brows in puzzlement, trying hard to ferret out deep and dark plots against the Government from Emma Silverman's lectures on Ibsen and Nietzsche and Strindberg. . .

One night two of them sat directly in front of Sarah Bleimant and myself . . obviously "dicks," from their thick, beet-red, shaven necks.

As Emma talked on, from the platform, about Strindberg's play, "The Father," that Victor Oland and his company had produced in the City,—my glance chanced to drop idly down under the chairs

where the two detectives sat on the lurk for incendiary utterances . . there I saw something dully a-glitter. A shiver ran through me.

"Just look at their bullet-heads and shaven, red necks, Johnny. Aren't they the dead ringers for a Masses' Cartoon?" observed Sarah.

"If you want to look anywhere," I whispered, "just cast your eyes down under their chairs . . one of them let his gat slip from his pocket."

"—Dare you to pick it up and hand it back to one of them—for a joke!"

"It might be a plant!"

"Then to pick it up and hand it back to one of them publicly would set them down as a couple of bigger fools than ever."

I hesitated.

"What? are you afraid?"

Here was an opportunity to win out over Otter, in Sarah's estimation, by showing my daring.

Cautiously I reached under. I gripped the object quickly—to lift an empty, discarded whiskey bottle!

When Sarah saw what I had retrieved, she grew hysterical with smothered laughter. . .

"They've killed it to the last drop," I observed in comic despair . . this set Sarah off worse—set us both off.

When the detectives turned around, uneasily looking in our direction, it did not help matters. Nor was our fit of laughter lessened by Emma's glaring down at us from the platform.

We rose and stumbled out over people's feet, Sarah stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth.

. . . . . .

On several occasions when I had an engagement to meet The Girl With the Buttons at The Fernando Center, she failed to show up. And several times she came very late, to find me chafing.

And now I came upon Otter, sitting beside her; when I was to have met her there alone.

I looked foolish, attempting nonchalance.

Otter did not leave us.

Instead, he crowded boldly up to Sarah on the other side . . glistening hunger in his eyes for her body's plumpness. . .

His hands moved of themselves along the rows of buttons on the faded, green dress she habitually wore . . strong, flexible hands, rendered supple and powerful by their continued exercise among clay and by hewing and shaping with hammer and chisel, blocks of marble and stone . . he had worked for years as a maker of gravestones and mortuary monuments before Morgan Wace discovered him, this poet-sculptor!

Sarah's body literally swelled seekingly upward under the touch of those powerful, lascivious fingers.

At last I snatched his hand away, flinging it off like an obnoxious object.

"Otter, keep your hands off my girl,—how many times must I warn you?"

"If you were a good Radical, Gregory, you'd at least wait till—'your girl'—objected."

Glancing at Sarah I noticed her eyes half-closed under the voluptuousness of his playing fingers.

She opened her eyes with a start, blushing to meet my gaze.

Presently Otter rose, excusing himself.

As he departed I was aware that he had directed a meaningful, triumphant glance of invitation, over my back, as he went . . for I detected the betraying response in Sarah's eyes.

. . . . . .

"My boy, my dear boy—these last few days you've resembled a ghost! What are you doing to yourself?" asked Janice, tenderness in her voice.

"Janice, it's hell, not to have a woman!" I blurted.

"That's not the first time I've heard a man make that confession!" She took my hand and stroked it soothingly.

"Oh, you damned women don't know how we men suffer for lack of you . . such of us as try to be good Radicals—such of us as don't have recourse to prostitutes—those among us who also detest the long, devious, hypocritic, diplomatic sex-pursuit you drag us pitilessly through! . ."

She patted my hand, not answering.

"—To the devil with you women! The trouble is, most of you haven't enough immediate passion . . somehow, the Caucasian has

trained his women not to be fit mates to the decent passion of a man."

"That's not true of as many of us as you think,—that lack of immediate passion:

"Johnny, you ought to marry—marry some solid, mature woman, a trifle older than you are, some one to mother and steady you; to take your mind off your sexual needs, steady you for your writing——"

"Thanks, but I'm no victim of the mother complex."

"—You're whirling about like a chicken with its head cut off . . I insist,—what you need is an older woman to take care of you . . support you."

"But——"

"Being supported by a woman is nothing to be fearful of, if you don't slack on your creative work. . .

"Freedom from economic worry—it would give you a chance to bring forth the great poetry I am convinced is in you, opportunity to gain the great name you must soon begin to inherit, or never come into."

"Theoretically, I don't see why not," I responded—"but,—well, I'm still essentially a middle westerner, a Kansan."

"A silly attitude, and you know it—to mind being supported by a sympathetic fellow being, who'd stand by you for the few years necessary for you to come to the full fruition of your poetic genius."

It was then, quite coolly and matter-of-factly, that Janice Godman proposed marriage to me.

. . . . . .

She had, she confessed, come to the conclusion that a woman at her time of life must have a mate. And she revered my work. She possessed enough of the world's goods for us both to live comfortably.

In the winter I could stay with her in her flat and write. In the summer, live with her in her big house on Curlew Island—a five-mile area of rock, and of stunted trees all blown grotesquely in one direction by the wind, and hemmed in by the continual foam of the whole, battering North Atlantic.

"There, great messages should come to you from the gods!"

I kept observing in admiration Janice's noble, homely face as she continued to set forth to me the advantage to both of us in our casting our lots into one . . her words were simple and frank. I admired her womanly courage. . .

And ashamed in my heart I was; for I knew, down deep, I would have taken advantage of her proposal if she had been comelier.

But there was no use in my not facing the deep torture my masculine vanity would ultimately undergo, if I became her husband or acknowledged sweetheart—the discomfiture I would endure everywhere I appeared with her. . .

. . . . . .

I don't recollect just how, in detail, I talked Janice out of the idea: but for once, at least, in my career, I did not blurt . . instead I summoned up all subtle discourse, evasive phrase—surprising aids of verbal adroitness I never suspected myself of having had at my disposal.

Till daybreak we sat there. . .

I left her,—proud of my achievement, grateful for my ability of speech. For I had turned the gradual drift of dialogue, that night, so that before I went away from her apartment, I left with her the conviction, that, after all, it was she who had decided I would not do as her mate.

I looked into her proud, scholarly face as I said good-by. I felt ignoble.

. . . . . .

We had, before I said good-by, eaten breakfast, lightly, impersonally.

She had sent me off with an armful of borrowed books of poetry, and a cheery invitation to join her, anyhow, next summer, at Curlew Island. . .

I spoke to nobody about what had happened between us.

I respected Janice's great spirit, her open attitude toward life. . .

And why shouldn't I avail myself of a summer's leisure at Curlew Island?

. . . . . .

But Jessie Cummins emphatically warned me off from going to Curlew Island:

"The general atmosphere will count against your doing creative

work. They smoke and talk all night, and, with dawn, plunge into the ocean . . then breakfast, a brief sleep, and they rouse themselves to more discussion."

. . . . . .

Instead, Jessie and her sweetheart, Jim Benders, cordially invited me to join them at Hillwood, their place of retreat each summer—located in a remote, primitive spot back in the Connecticut hills, where farmers still plowed with oxen, as in the days of their forefathers . . where fields produced mostly crops of stones that worked to the surface in batches every year—and long, green tobacco leaves, that afterwards yellowed pungently, hung up in strips in sheds and barns. . .

"Do come to Hillwood with us . . the grand quiet and peace back in the hills will lend you all the power you need for your poetry."

. . . . . .

Two old acquaintances resumed touch with my life: Mrs. Vintoun sent me an invitation to come and have tea with her . . chiding me for my neglect of her . . and I knew she had been seeing a recent poem or two of mine in the magazines.

And Ruth let me know that she was in town on the way to Europe with her employer, Raymond Didier, and his staff attending him on his mission,—a very diplomatic corps. For Didier had literally bought over an entire community, one of those quaint, seldom-heard-of republics tucked away somewhere in the Pyrenees, which he was going to run on the Single Tax plan, to prove to the world, once and for all, the feasibility and practicability of that theory—at the expense of at least fifty thousand dollars of his money—to begin with! . .

"The old boy's shooting the works, this time! . ."

. . . . . .

It was good to clasp Ruth's warm, friendly hand again, to kiss her on her ingenuous, broad, placid face, wet with the falling, ghostly flakes of a blowing snow storm, that dark winter evening. . .

"We're stopping over only a few days, here in New York—can't you take me somewhere, Johnny, before we leave? It's been quite pastoral and dull up at Tarleton Farms . . I've been months there . . and you know what drab companionship Didier gives!"

"And how are the Norns?"

"One of them died, poor thing!"

. . . . . .

It chanced that on the next evening was to be held the Radical event of the year—the annual anarchist ball,—at the Lenox Casino. . .

"But I have no costume, no anything to make one out of," said Ruth, on my inviting her to go there with me.

I had two comps.

"It's not obligatory . . I'm not going to wear a costume."

Ruth took me to supper to our erstwhile favorite chop suey joint; we found unoccupied, our very table of laquered mother-of-pearl, in the secluded corner booth whence, from two windows, we could look out on the busy, enormous traffic and the early evening lights.

The mechanical piano began frightfully; some one had dropped a nickel in the slot, in another of the secluded booths, I averred. (It was I who had done it surreptitiously) . .

Pretending horror over the barbarous clash and strumming, Ruth stopped both ears. But she laughed gleefully. . . "you don't know how good it is to be back in New York, with you, you old rogue!"

"And you don't know how good it is to see YOU again!"

. . . . . .

The fugitive wind whipped rapidly around corners. It dipped and swirled, stood still a moment, then renewed its chill flight. I pressed my hands to my cheeks that burned in the wind. I chafed my ears, and held my nose.

"It's good you've learned enough sense to wear an overcoat,—weather like this!"—Ruth, giving my arm an affectionate squeeze; "they say a perfected invention is the product of a hundred unknown inventors . . so women, one after the other—acquaintances, friends, sweethearts, wives maybe—will bring you yet to the complete semblance of a man!"

. . . . . .

But in the Casino it was not cold, no matter how hard the wind went without. There it steamed soggily from the animal heat emanated from the bodies of a multitude. Outside the regulars who attended—Emma Silverman's annual anarchist dance held for the benefit of her magazine "Free Earth," had become an event flocked

to, and much thronged, by sightseers and curiosity-mongers that swelled in number each year.

This year all previous attendance was twice exceeded.

The circular gallery was packed thick with jamming bodies, shoulders, heads, faces—all the fairly expensive boxes bought out. And the floor was crushing-tight with standing onlookers, who, in the first and last instance, came not to participate, but to look on and see what strange things happened . . already they stood twenty deep from the walls. . .

"Look at all the damn bourgeoisie!" exclaimed André Ravenél, at the top of his strong voice—the throng easily hearing his objurgative remark, but accepting it as part of the show they had paid to see.

"You let up on the bourgeoisie to-night, André," exclaimed Emma merrily, "they're helping the Cause for once . . through them 'Free Earth' will be enabled to keep on another year."

There was but a narrow, oblong space left to dance in.

On a slightly raised dais a negro orchestra of six or eight shuttled their bodies like bobbins and piston rods—playing their musical instruments, shouting, singing, whistling, gesticulating in black-man abandon . . reeling off fox trots, turkey trots, bunny hugs. . .

Sarah Bleimant was there, I noted: and hurt in heart and pride, I interpreted rightly her yielding herself in a bunny-hug to Otter, lying close as glue to him as they hopped and jerked past me and Ruth. . .

Watching my opportunity, when Ruth had been hauled off by a friend from the Ferrer School, I thrust my way toward Sarah, asking her for the next trot . . which, immediately the music struck up, I turned maliciously into a two mile run, tugging her bearishly about; her buttons burst off by twos and threes from her dress.

"Stop!" Anger lifted its crest above her plump timidity; "what are you trying to do—undress me in public?"

"Neither in public nor in private!" I affirmed hatefully.

She was breathing distressfully; she rolled her mild, blue eyes in distress, searching about for Otter—who soon hurried up, a full witness of what had taken place, white with suppressed fury of resentment; but letting his resentment go no further than his usual mild voice of affected sweet-kindness. . .

"Gregory—you shouldn't be so rough!"

I pushed Otter aside and waded shoulderingly back to Ruth, waiting for me.

"What have you got against that girl?" asked Ruth, who had seen—as we turkey-trotted off. . .

"Nothing—only she's a fool!"—I began already to feel mean and small—"she pestered me to dance with her—she's always bothering me wherever she meets me!" I lied, "but I made her dance some of the sloth out of her fatness, you bet—along with a row of buttons from her silly dress."

There came over me a cruel glow of satisfaction.

Then, immediately after, a wave of shame swept over me for having ridiculed the girl's one poor dress.

. . . . . .

Ruth was in body a vigorous boy. Long, brisk Massachusetts hill walks and rambles over country roads had hardened her body into supple, vigorous flesh. . .

Her flowing loins and rapid hips were tireless as we raced around, around, up, down. . .

"You can't dance expertly," she observed, "but you have a sense of rhythm, ability to follow the music—all that's needed in these dances."

More drinks loosened me acrobatically; together we made a flying team; murmurs of applause came from the by-standing on-lookers, a stream of newcomers crowding the first arrivals closer and closer; they tongued out among us; they swayed back; they tongued out again. . .

In a corner stood a few crude, bare wooden tables reserved for the dancers who wished to rest; there we drank draughts of excellent beer, to cool off after our exertions.

A group of us from the Village were there in a mob: Arnold Rankin, Junius Alverson, Vera Williams, Minnie Saxe, Frank Grayson, The Matthewsons, Dava Juston, André Ravenél, Jim Benders, Jessie Cummins, Janice Godman, and others.

Many of us kicked off our shoes, and, shouting, danced about. . .

Several girls from The Fernando Center—who incidentally were possessed of pretty feet and ankles—whisked off their stockings and turkey-trotted barefoot.

In a spontaneous sweep of voices "The Internationale" was taken up.

A space was cleared: one fellow vaulted over a table to a wind of applause, and fell to a squatting posture on the other side, dancing a Cossack dance from his flexed haunches. . .

Dizzily hilarious from beer, cocktails, youth, and heat of exercise —I, too, hurled myself forward, leaping topheavily over the same table, but snagging my foot perilously through the back of a chair that fortunately broke with my weight.

I wasn't hurt.

I whooped and kicked the chair off my leg high into the air.

The crowd shouted and broke into applause at my grotesque acrobatics. . .

Lloyd Dowton spoke up, rolling out his rumbling voice to its fullest extent like distant thunder—in rebuke for our carrying on in an undignified manner, in the presence of outsiders; it would not help, but would hinder, the Cause, he averred; would lead to further misunderstanding of Radicalism——

"They're determined to misunderstand, anyhow,—why let them put a crimp in our fun?" cried Lilla Matthewson, leaning forward; the milk-white division of her breasts, the delightful timbre of her speaking tones, and her certain mask-like excellence of face, brought the robust, thick-set Lloyd Dowton to subsidence, in a vocal thunder that growled and rumbled lower; he turned to Lilla gruffly amiable, taken captive by her panther handsomeness. . .

. . . . . .

Dowton, coming more and more among us,—was a brilliant man, an author of several books on the East Side; on Labor; the writer of a celebrated novel with an anarchist as hero. . .

He was currently engaged in writing a series of radical-idealistic feuilletons that were, inexplicably, appearing in one of the City's most conservative newspapers . . breaking lances for Emma Silverman, for Mack Alexander; he had even written a paper on "the necessity of corrective violence for Governments."

We were in a state of perpetual wonderment at how he managed to "get away with it."

. . . . . .

Ravenél, gentlest and gentlemanliest of philosophic anarchists

when sober; when drunk, though never mean, was generally obstreperous. He was now quite drunk.

When sober he was neater than a laundry.

A slight soilure of the shirt, a rumpled effect of hair, spelt drunkenness. . .

He came capering toward us, his clothes askew,—puffing out his lips amusingly. . .

"Hello, Little Lloyd-ie! Hello, little Johnnie! . . Emma, beloved one!"

Promiscuously affectionate, he piled over us, addressing us with loving diminutives, kissing us all on the cheek in the European manner. . .

"Yes! Yes, André," urged Dowton, embarrassed, "—sit down, do,—and have another beer."

"All right, Lloyd-ie,—I'll have two more drinks, and then I'll dance for these damned bourgeoisie. . ."

Ravenél began a laughable solo dance of his own invention, accompanying his steps and capers, while he whirled his cane over his head, with a song in a foreign tongue, rendered boomingly through explosive lips. . .

"Don't misjudge Ravenél to be a fool," I overheard a man remark to a girl,—"André's a great scholar, a fine writer—speaks and writes I don't know how many languages.

"Years ago, when a student in Austria, and a citizen of one of the smaller, suppressed nationalities, he served five years in solitary, simply because he fought for the right of his countrymen to learn their own language in the schools.

"This is the way he blows off steam . . otherwise he's a fine, sensitive being . . it would do the Movement good to have a few more like him.

"With five more like him," rumbled Dowton subterraneously, "the Movement would come to an end."

There was hearty laughter at this sally, while all eyes were directed to where André Ravenél had plopped flat on the floor, and from that point of vantage, was blowing kisses at the crowd.

. . . . . .

In the grey of the morning light we commandeered two taxis for us Villagers, and piled in on top of each other, the chauffeurs pro-

testing that we were too many and that the cops would stop us—and we were whisked south to Washington Square to the two small rooms in the upper story of the squat, two-story frame house that stood there, a remnant of Revolutionary days, when Washington Square was the potters' field.

Here, in the two upper rooms, held forth "The Diminutive Club," that small and choice group mainly of Janice's forming.

. . . . . .

Directly beneath the rooms of "The Diminutive Club" and fronting the Washington Arch, was the Arch Café—reputed gathering place, then, for the notorious Car-Barn Bandits. . .

Once Janice perpetrated a social experiment distasteful to her fellow members of "The Diminutive Club": when she struck up an acquaintance with one of these gunmen, brought him up the narrow stairs to a session of the Club, and introduced him all around . . on which occasion it is reported the thug was more embarrassed than his embarrassed hosts—Janice, the only one present who preserved her aplomb and assurance. . .

"Beg pardon, my friend!" thus Janice had approached him, "but aren't you a member of a Gang? If so, I wish you'd come upstairs with me and meet my friends . . I'm Janice Godman, and I teach English in the Enderby High School."

Janice's direct approach had nonplussed the gangster——

"Yes, Miss, I'd—I'd be pleased to meet your friends," dazed—and meekly he had followed her upstairs to afternoon tea.

. . . . . .

But I digress——

The Annual Anarchist Ball over, we were seated, in "The Diminutive Club" . . on the floor,—most of us, . . a floor softened with cushions . . we were hazy-minded, half-dreaming, from lack of sleep. . .

"Johnny," commanded Janice, "you get up and help me with the coffee."

I roused my unwilling legs from under me. . .

"Here; carry these cups around."

"All right, Janice."

"Notice how sluggish the bunch is!" Janice remarked vivaciously, temporary wrinkles of tiredness about her eyes——

"Then, observe how, in a twinkling after they've enlivened themselves with a few sips, they'll all be chirping away like early sparrows."

With the first few sips the group began an instant chatter, in amusing fulfillment of Janice's prediction. . .

"There's magic in a cup of strong coffee."

"It certainly does buck one up."

But Hulky Jim Benders would have none of it.

"It 'ud take away the glow!—Refuse to spoil the effect of what I've got inside already." And he waved the cup aside. Dangerously and drunkenly he clambered out, and perched swayingly on the narrow ledge running under the window.

Not having been able to restrain him from going out, nor daring to risk wrestling with him to bring him back in, from his perilous position, Frank Grayson and Junius Alverson held tight onto his coat. . .

Lloyd Dowton, oblivious of what was taking place, sat at Lilla Matthewson's feet, entirely taken by her charm. Though her perfect mask of a face sagged with tiredness at first, gradually the coffee was bringing it back to its pristine handsomeness. . .

"Come on back in, Jim!" pleaded Jessie.

"Not when it's so much fun out here."

A passing cop stopped, sagely lifted his eye, called up——

"Git in out o' there, or ye'll break yer neck . . the wind'll blow you down, if ye don't fall yerself, ye damn fool!"

"Don't you go calling me 'damn fool'—I have my constitutional rights. And what's it to you whether I break my neck or not?

"Isn't it MY neck, and haven't I a right to do what I want with what belongs to me?"

The officer looked nonplussed—here was a wise bird he'd best let alone. You couldn't tell what these educated chaps might spring on a fellow—(that was how I figured out the thoughts of the cop, as he paused there, puzzling)——

"And officer," continued Benders, shaking a large, irrelevant forefinger down at him, "you look like a decent fellow, despite your uniform, and, in return for your kind attentions, I'll let you in on a great secret . . it's this: through long experience I've at last learned that this city, commonly denominated 'New York,' is a sav-

age and beautiful virgin—not a corrupt harlot, as young Mr. Viereck would have you falsely believe, in his poem 'Nineveh'. . .

"No, sir 'e! she's not a harlot, but a young and powerful virgin that will not give herself until you take her by force!

"But after that, by God, she's yours, from soul to finger-tips!"

The officer looked sore . . was the fellow trying to kid him?

"Come back in, Jim, and don't be maudlin!" commanded Janice.

"Yes, Jim dear," his sweetheart, Jessie Cummins urged softly and possessively,—by her tone rebuking Janice for her attempted power over her man—"yes, Jim dear, *do* come in!"

By this time, the officer, visibly growing choleric over what he had not wholly comprehended, was almost deciding to take as a personal affront, Jim's dictum on the virginity of New York. . .

"Yep!—better drag 'Jim dear' back up again, before I send for a patron wagon fer the lot o' ye!"

Lloyd Dowton waked at last to a realization of what was happening; tearing himself away from Lilla he leapt forward, deeply vociferous. . .

As ten hands, under his direction, had Benders by the arms, collar, coat tail, slack of the pants, legs,—dragging him up into the room from the ledge.

Swinging his club ferociously, affecting a troubled whistle to cover over his wrathful confusion, the officer stalked away.

. . . . . .

The excitement having subsided, we discussed Julius Flatman,—who had not gone to the Ball:

"—Bet he didn't go because Mary Wyndham, Danforth's sister-in-law, turned him down . . !"

" 'Red' Flatman, though he has his qualities . . if you're looking for my opinion—just DOESN'T BELONG!—'Life of the Party'—have any of you ever travelled on shipboard?—well, on every ship a moron is sure to pop up, early during the voyage, known as the 'Life of the Party'—nuf said.'

"That's what 'Red' has tried to be ever since he hit the Village. . ."

"—Right! He doesn't get us at all——"

"You bet he doesn't!—strives so hard to be 'Bohemian' . . feels it incumbent on himself to try to kiss all the women."

"He is, and will be, to the end, I'm afraid,—essentially a small-town product."—Janice.

. . . . . .

Outside, homeward-bound severally and in buffeted twos and threes, we struggled against the whipping, bleak wind. . .

"It's a miracle Jim didn't tumble off the ledge."

"—Drunkard's luck, I suppose."

Back at Mrs. Nough's and trying to effect a careful, noiseless entrance; my very anxiety, combined with a sudden fit of wind, brought the front door to with a bang that resounded through the house, that still Sunday morning. . .

Hoping that I had not roused the other lodgers, in a moment I had my clothes completely off and was standing stark by my bed, when "Red" Flatman, gawky and gangly in a gaudy bathrobe, appeared, fronting me accusingly.

Without knocking, he had impudently dared fling open my door, to bawl me out.

"Gregory, I'd like to know what the hell you mean, banging the front door Sunday morning, and waking the whole house up?"

His twist of sandy-red hair flared sidelong in the early light. His small eyes, shrunk smaller, had dwindled to points of gimlet anger. His lean, concave face was white with the same.

Glaring back at him—"Since when did you become the whole house, Flatman?" I asked—"suppose you, by God, think you're the Star Roomer here?"

"I AM the Star Roomer here," came the unexpected, humorless reply, "and," he continued, unflinching in his seriousness, "I'll let Mrs. Nough know of your behavior, as soon as it's a decent time of day—when you'll leave this house, or I shall!"

I was sore.

"Flatman—how dare you come here and talk to me so? . . after all the noise you and your parties have been making, most of the night, at least once a week? . . when I've been a good sport and never raised a kick . . say, what kind of a man do you call yourself, anyhow?"

"Listen, Gregory! I have a right to a little leeway in my behavior—I've been here longest—that ought to earn some privilege—

while you—" he was incredibly replying, with maintained gravity——

"—Star Roomer or not," I burst in, hardly able to control myself, "you beat it, quick, out of my doorway, or I'll kick you right down that stairway back of you."

He turned and stalked away, drawing his bathrobe about him in an old-fashioned actor's gesture of dignity.

. . . . . .

"We women choose our mates on a fairer and more sensible basis than you men do. We choose our partners for their capabilities . . but, as far as I've been able to observe, it's what you males call 'chickens'—pretty, insipid girls—that you choose for your wives and sweethearts."

This was the gist of Janice's contention that night at the dinner of "The Dayspring Club," a dining and debating society. . .

And Chester Billington, a well-known lawyer in the Radical world, had risen, replying with brutal candor—before all the professional women assembled . . the table heaped with demolished scraps of food . . half-empty wine glasses standing at each one's elbow——

"Frankly,—yes—" Billington was admitting—"it *is* the chicken type of women that all men, left normally to themselves, from banker to poet, choose. . .!

"It's a definite law of nature stronger than all ethical theory, that mature men should seek out younger women for mates . . because it's better for the race. . ."

By Billington's side sat a young woman whom he had brought as guest, who was young, beautiful, and thoroughly illustrative of his argument——

"In the course of his life," Billington continued—" every man should have had two wives: one, when he is a young man,—of equal age; and, when he's between forty and fifty, another of from eighteen to twenty-five.

"A woman ages twice as rapidly as a man . . don't look at me so severely—you women present— blame it on the laws of nature, not on me!"

There rose a murmur of disapprobation, salted with hisses.

Billington, again——

"My dear ladies, I'm not to be blamed for a biological fact! I think your hissing is stupid and in very bad taste!"

Immediately after, I, along with Janice and others, rose in rebuttal.

I felt the charlatan I was, in taking the opposite side and currying favor with the older women present, when I knew what Billington said, was a fact.

. . . . . .

There came among us a Frenchwoman who styled herself "Countess" . . informing the usually not-to-be-taken-in Clara Janning, the magazine writer, and Vera Williams, whom she had met at a tea uptown, that she had heard of "The Village" in Europe, and would like to meet us and get to know us. . .

The Countess de Montresmil wrote. She gave it out that she was at present engaged in writing a book on contemporary American Life, in which she sought to give the Radical groups and the activities of the Village a prominent position. . .

To facilitate her general introduction to us, Clara Janning, after all easy-hearted and genial, arranged a dinner party at a well-known Italian restaurant. . .

. . . . . .

I was amazed at the "side" our group put on, to make their best appearance . . amazed at the naïve conventional vanities that came to the fore that I had never suspected in my friends. . .

Most of the men came in dress suits, most of the women in low-necked gowns . . Janice of course did not compromise . . but I myself was not without my pose . . I had discovered that I looked burly and strong in corduroys. Besides they represented the uniform of Bohemianism to me; also being cheap to buy, and wearing long. . .

Vera Williams presented another notable exception. She came in a neat, tailormade business suit . . but even she considered, I could detect by a certain self-consciousness in her behavior, that she was, so, representing the type of serious-minded American feminist who sought freedom chiefly along economic lines, in contradistinction to the prevailing emphasis on freedom in personal behavior.

The dinner proceeded with quiet dignity, till Grayson and I began relating broad anecdotes across the table . . in deliberate resent-

ment of the affected manner of the Countess and several of her hosts weakly imitating her. . .

And after we'd drunk a bottle of wine apiece, while Frank grinned, I reached around Junius Alverson and fetched Clara Janning a huge slap on the broad expanse of her bare back, ostentatiously familiar. . .

. . . . . .

"You and Frank behaved horribly!"

"—Like two small boys showing off before parlor company."

"In all probability the Countess will think that's our ordinary behavior, and put a lot of nonsense in her book—about *us*!"

Again I maintained that "Clara's Countess" was a "fake." . .

. . . . . .

Later she pried her way into the private affairs of every individual of several Radical groups . . made the acquaintance of Sally Lansing, the settlement worker who had married Everett James, the society man, and of Kay Denny and Will Birmingham, the playwright. . .

Sally and Kay, though legally married, were members of a league which pledged them to use their maiden names. . .

Kay Denny, while out of town for a few weeks, turned her apartment over to the Countess de Montresmil . . but when the former learned that her guest had been priming the maid and cook with questions as to whether she and Birmingham were legally married, and, if so why did "Meeses" Denny call herself "Mees"—she indignantly ousted her guest from her apartment. . .

It was not the questions the Countess had asked, but the tone of intrigue with which she had asked them, that had angered Kay, she averred.

Later, when it was discovered that the woman was a fake, many of us were rather chagrined . . Grayson and I were glad. . .

. . . . . .

And now summer was come in again, and the heat and languor of that season in the City beginning, I bethought myself of the invitation that Jessie Cummins and Jim Benders had extended me, to spend a few months with them in their farmhouse at Hillwood, in Northern Connecticut. . .

I was to contribute fifteen dollars a month for my keep. Life

would be easy and simple up there. My friends had their own garden-plot where they grew most of the food they ate. From the nearest farmer-neighbor, three-quarters of a mile distant, fresh eggs and milk and butter were to be bought, cheap. Water ran, fresh and leaping, from a living rock-spring, into the house, through a slim pipe that Jim had put in . . the house itself possessed seven rooms . . in each of the downstairs rooms a fireplace welcomed wood to burn, on brisk days . . Jessie gave me the requisite information, jumbled thus.

. . . . . .

"Janice, it's about time for me to *arrive!* This one summer of solid work will bring me my fame!—up there among the jutting, grey rocks and secluded fields of Connecticut, I'll finally put it over."

Janice and I were in the back room of "The Old Farm," friendly as we had ever been. . . Big Bill, proprietor of "The Old Farm," carrying his genial, Falstaffian bulk before himself, was bringing us two seidels of Münchner beer. . .

On the walls hung four old-fashioned pictures:

There was "Sherman's March to the Sea"—soldiers in it tearing up a railroad track, while, in the background, a countryside was going up in flames and clouds of smoke.

Then there were three old-fashioned ensemble pictures of poets of three nationalities; English, German, American: Shakespeare with his contemporaries grouped about him; Gœthe with his contemporaries; Longfellow, with his! . .

On the opposite wall hung a huge Germanic painting representing the courtyard of a Bavarian inn festooned heavily with vines gravid with enormous grape clusters and other Bacchic ornamentation and elaborate scrollwork. . .

At tables men sat guzzling out of generous mugs the lids of which were uptilted; from under the lids burst rivulets of foam; on the knees of the Brobdingnagian drinkers sprawled Gargantuan women, great bosoms a-burst from negligently laced bodices . . women and men, they were pledging each other hilariously, amorously, from high-held, overflowing, ornamented mugs.

Beneath this gorgeous scene ran the legend, in florid Gothic type——

"Wer liebt nicht wein, weib, und gesang
Bleibt ein narr sein leben lang"—Martin Luther's lusty rhyme——

"Who loves not wine, women and song,
Stays a fool his whole life long!"

. . . . . .

"—To win your immortal fame?"—echoed Janice, "boy, others would be offended by your frank magniloquence; I rather enjoy it.

"But what do you expect to write that will win you your fame so promptly?"

"A great, allegorical novel of the Coming Revolution!"

"Allegory?—that sounds rather forbidding."

"It oughtn't to. Think back, and you'll find that the great allegorical writings are the things that have shaken and shaped the world—Dante's Inferno, Milton's Paradise Lost——"

"I would hardly call them allegories——"

"Well, then,—Piers Plowman, Pilgrim's Progress. . .

"My work will be a modern prose Piers The Plowman. . .

"The story, briefly—the tale of the Capitalists of the world involved in a last great struggle to keep down the Proletariat——

"From the Proletariat rises a giant of a leader, a sort of idealized Big Joe Oakman—a giant of a leader who 'snatches victory from the event' for his people——"

"After which there will be only workers?——"

"That will be the idea——"

"Quite a large canvas, eh?"

A long draught from our Münchner. Silence. Our eyes couldn't help smiling into each other. . .

"Now, frankly—keep looking me in the eyes, Johnny—you don't REALLY believe in turning over more power to the unintelligent hordes of humanity than they have at present, do you?"

"Janice, I don't know exactly what I believe, but, God knows, I want life freer for all of us, for everybody, and if I can only stir up something——"

"—Blindly? There's a lot of social mischief in you, isn't there?"

"Isn't there in all of us?"

"I sometimes tremble," Janice observed, "at the things that our

present under-rated group, in their general idealism, are letting loose on the world!"

. . . . . .

"Then there's another idea I have, for a colossal play!—Napoleon and Christ its equal protagonists—Napoleon trying to bring in the Kingdom of Heaven by violence, based on that strange text in The New Testament 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' . .

"Napoleon believing himself the fulfiller of the text, a lieutenant of Christ——"

"Knocking the nations' heads together," put in Janice quickly, "to make the silly fools behave?——"

" 'Annealing them by holy violence into one'; that's exactly what I mean. . .

"But the climax, at St. Helena. . .

"Napoleon a failure, in a burst of death's despair reviewing his shadowy marshals one by one—rebuking them for their mistakes——

"At last one stands before him majestically, one whom he does not know——

"Which one of my Marshals are you? I do not remember you?

"It is Christ!"

"And you expect to write both these—the novel and the play, in a few months of summer?"

"Why not—if the inspiration comes!"

"Delusions of grandeur!—have another beer!"

. . . . . .

I learned that, belonging to the Public library, I might take advantage of a student's vacation arrangement and draw out quite a number of books for a period of several months; that I could renew them by mail. . .

I loaded myself up with books on Napoleon, and was off for Hillwood.

. . . . . .

Jessie Cummins' cherry-round face, the fair, fine gold of her hair lightly blowing about her flushed cheeks—I saw her from far down the track.

The gallant little body had been walking fast, at the last minute, it seemed, to be at the station on time to meet me.

One or two countrymen stood about, staring and silent, after the manner of their own domestic animals. . .

"Where's Jim?"

As I swung down, ballasting back against the weight of my heavy bulging grip full of manuscript, I was disappointed to find myself welcomed by but one of my hosts.

"Jim's busy."

Seeing a shadow of disappointment flit across my face——

"You mustn't give his not being here a wrong interpretation. . .

"Jim's every bit as glad to have you come and stay with us, as I am. . .

"But he's gone daft over a boat he's building, single-handed.

"Oh, Mr. Shields, will you give us a lift up the hill in your wagon?

"Is this all you brought?"

"No. I have a trunk full of books on Napoleon coming by freight."

. . . . . .

"Oh, Jim! JIM! . . Johnny's here!"

There was no response to Jessie's enthusiastic calling. . .

Going into the house, through it, and out at the back door, there we found Jim Benders, in a field of wind-flowing grasses; standing affectionately over the keel and skeleton of his boat-to-be. . .

He would not have heard thunder a foot from his ear, he was so absorbed in his work.

He gave a jump when Jessie's hand lay on his arm. He had been rooted there, softly whistling in abstraction, his cap pushed back above his large, sweaty brow, with the peak turned round over the back of his neck to keep off the blistering sun—unusually warm for the early summer and for those cool, far-folded hills.

Jim's chin, that receded extremely, lent him a startling resemblance to a rather silly bird looking down lovingly into its nest before hopping in to brood over its fledglings. . .

He drew a caressing hand along the framework of the "Ark," turning to greet me. While he talked with me he never completely removed his hand from his boat. . .

The warmth of his smile that soon shifted into a hearty laugh, dispelled any doubt of my welcome. . .

"You see, I couldn't leave my child (meaning the boat)—I'm just laying its keel, you know . . and the grace and build of the entire craft depends on that's turning out perfect, any shipwright will tell you."

"—Great stuff, Jim; you're doing a fine job of it, too!" I responded.

Jessie's face was pleasant to look upon, when she saw I was sympathetic, understanding Jim and his love for boats. . .

"But how are you going to bring it down to the lake?" I somewhat jested, "after you've got it built?" . .

For Wampum Lake glimmered through the pines fully a mile below; Jessie had pointed it out to me as Farmer Shields had conveyed us houseward; it lay down a long, rocky descent, snug between folds of lesser hills.

"—Get it down? That'll be easy . . there's a rough road yonder, leading through the pines, that your eyes can't pick out without practice—that goes to the lake's foot . . and farmer Shields, our neighbor, will hitch up his oxen and load it down to the water for me."

He dropped his hammer, and laid his free hand on my shoulder friendly-wise, and we shared a jest about a religious fanatic in the Tennessee mountains—a tall, long-whiskered fellow who crazily claimed he'd been forewarned by Jehovah of the imminency of another Deluge, and had been divinely nominated the new Noah . . and was hard at work shaping another Ark.

When asked how he'd get the huge craft down to the water from the mountain-top—"it's my job to build this here Ark:

"It's God's job to bring the water up to it, stranger!"

. . . . . .

Though opposites in nature and disposition, Jessie and Jim seemed fairly happy together . . she, radiant-faced from quick emotions, hungry for talk and discussion, yet Scotch-canny in the practical affairs of the world and in the economy of household affairs. . . Jim, slow of speech and sparing of word, Indian-complected, pottering about at the making of his boat—a belated pioneer.

The management and support of the house fell entirely upon Jessie.

Jim was writing a novel which he expected would bring much money; he had temporarily laid by his devotion to his poetry.

. . . . . .

Their baby, it had grown into a small colossus, like the baby of Mrs. Firth. Did all small women, I wondered, give birth to huge babies? . .

Zelda was a girl-baby. She had progressed in infant ambulation to the stage where she went gravely about on all fours, a roaming bear cub, daa-daa-ing and gurgling into odd corners of the house . . putting everything she came upon into her mouth.

. . . . . .

I was rather glad than otherwise, to put in a few hours a day hoeing in the garden, when I found I could work naked . . among the potatoes and tomato plants . . there was a delightful, utter freedom in breathing, not only with the lungs, but through every pore of the body.

"—But you'd best keep your shirt and pants close by—at least, your pants," Jim advised—"myself, I often hoe without my shirt and whenever Neighbor Shields passes by driving his ox-team he's used to seeing me so . . but, if he should come upon you, stripped to the buff," Jim paused in pregnant silence, knocking the ashes out of his briar pipe—a frequent gesture of his indicating deliberation—"I'm afraid he'd think it a bit too much!"

. . . . . .

So I held my pants in wary readiness, near a rock, and raced to them, falling down behind the rock and snaking into them, at the least sound of human approach . . cursing the narrowness and intolerance of humanity that objected to the whole skin people were born in. . .

The clatter of an approaching hay-wagon . . then the oxen's heads showing, then neighbor Shields striding gravely beside their rumps——

" 'Lo, friend, fine day, beent it?"

"Yep, mighty fine day!" I would respond, bending innocently over my hoeing.

After the ox-team and the perspiring laconic farmer had lumbered by, off went pants again . . my heart jubilant and defiant.

. . . . . .

"It's easy to live, up here," remarked Benders, "why, we could stay here the year round, on practically nothing . . growing our own produce."

"It's living in the City every winter that knocks the bottom out of the budget"—Jessie.

"We mean eventually to buy this place"—Jim—"so, when the Social Revolution comes, or the World War (Jim was forever insisting that a world war was imminent, we teasing him for his prophetic seriousness)—"when the World War comes—and it's sure to be that or the Revolution . . then we'll find ourselves all hunky-dory, here, on our own plot of ground."

"The Social Revolution won't hurt us," remarked Jessie.

"There'll be a period of readjustment that will hurt us . . unless we're settled on a farm where we can grow our own food . . but the Capitalists will bring about several world wars first, to head the Revolution off!"

"You think so?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't . . I try not to waste words. . .

"And in every violent social change, the farm dwellers are the last to feel the pinch, because the soil's right under their feet . . it's different with the poor wretches that live in towns and cities!"

. . . . . .

Jessie had allotted me a room on the top floor, but I was little in it, choosing rather to stay outside in the fields and on the hillsides during the day . . sunbathing . . hoeing in the garden-plot . . writing . . reading . . gadding about. . .

When night fell I slept out in the air on a cot dragged close under a small maple—except when it rained . . when I hurriedly dragged mattress, sheets, and quilts to shelter, returning to my room. . .

. . . . . .

Jim's boat finished, Shields and his leaning, raw-boned son—both close-mouthed, crafty-looking Yankees stringy and brown-dry like their tobacco plants, and meager from long inbreeding—Shields and his son gee-ed and hawed their oxen, hauling the boat down the steep, woody incline to Wampum Lake.

Jim Benders they accepted familiarly, one of their kind; he seem-

ing also to belong to the moss-matted, black-brownish earth and lichened boulders.

. . . . . .

"—Strange, how we've all been mixed up with Penton Baxter's career," Jessie observed, one morning.

"Yes—suppose it was the call that he sent forth, to which youth that has inexperience and idealism responds readily"—myself.

Jim gave us a troubled look before he decided to join in the conversation;

"I don't see anything strange about it . . it's just coincidence."

"Nonsense—the idealism of youth!" Jessie, echoing me in confirmation.

"—And personal magnetism," I added. "There was Roderick Spalton, at the Eos Artwork Studios—the chap who wrote the Brief Journeys to the Homes of Famous Folk; he had the same drawing power . . every week, almost every day, brought young folk on pilgrimage to him—young men and young women who sought something else in life besides stuffy domesticity and living for others."

"What's wrong about living for others?"—Jim.

"Nothing—beyond the fact that there's a vast body of cant and nauseating sham in such talk: if everybody lived for himself, it would give other people a chance to live for themselves . . that sounds paradoxical, but it's true . . since nobody can live for another!"

"Johnny's right," it was as if Jessie and I had banded together to conduct an argument against Benders as a third party—"it's the same argument you hear about parents living for their children; since every child practically becomes in turn a parent—when would anybody ever live for himself, or herself?"

"But we're way off the trail—we were talking about youth!" Benders.

"And, before that, if we must go back to the start, about Julius Flatman; and how Jim, Julius, and I first met, all three together, at Baxter's socialist-communistic experiment, Halcyon Hall."

. . . . . .

Then was brought up in reminiscence of the previous summer, an anecdote of "Red" Flatman's unconscious selfishness . . when he had been visiting, as I now,—at Hillwood. . .

It was told me how one morning Flatman had nonchalantly dipped his hairbrush into the waterbutt, afterward applying its wet bristles to his mop of unruly hair. . .

"He's so keen on himself he often doesn't know what he does."

"It made poor Workmann, the Swedish literary critic, retch, from a delicate stomach——

" 'Jim, Jessie,' he called in tragic despair, 'did you see what "Red" has just done? . .'

"Luckily," explained Jessie, minimizing,—"there is a continual flow of water through the barrel. . ."

. . . . . .

"Got those sandwiches ready, Jessie?"

She had them ready.

"Well, good-by, for the day, folks!" And Jim was off to lounge in his beloved Ark, writing away on his book, the novel he had in hand.

. . . . . .

But in chuckling in remembrance of the bad manners of Julius Flatman, Jim Benders was blind to his own. . .

I suppose it came from their spending their summers up there alone, for the most part unvisited, on their isolated farm, that caused Jim to fall into gross indelicacies of table behavior that he seemed himself not to notice . . his putting a piece of meat on your plate with the fork he ate with, or, worse, his reaching across to a common dish of some vegetable or other and eating directly out of it; worst of all, he would lift the spoon out of a jar of jam or marmalade, lick it "clean," nonchalantly replace it; a minute later, if the whim took him, repeat the nauseous trick . . sometimes Jessie forgetfully imitated him, though consciously glancing at me to see if I noticed. . .

I kept my eyes down, not to let them see me look my disgust.

"A couple need the rest of society to keep themselves decent," I thought.

. . . . . .

"Men of Eleusis, ye that with long staves
Sit in the market houses, and speak words
Made sweet with wisdom as the rare wine is
Thickened with honey."

I was reading Swinburne's "At Eleusis" at the breakfast table; Jessie and I sitting on still, sipping more coffee (we ate breakfast outdoors at a small table on the back porch)——

Jim had risen long before. Now he thrust his head out from within the house—"So long, folks, I'm off to Wampum Lake for the day."

"So long, Jim . . good luck with the book!"

. . . . . .

The birds singing lustily in the trees about, the smell of flowers and green things wafting to us, there, in the good morning . . Jessie and I, lingering at breakfast . . Jim early disappearing . . once or twice referring in slow geniality slightly tinged with crabbedness to the fact that "too much talk made him tired!"

Yet when Jim was caught up in the eager current of a discussion, he himself proved voluble . . stopping, however, as if he disapproved of the loquacity into which his interest had betrayed him. . .

"For nothing is ever solved by talk!" he'd exclaim.

. . . . . .

"I'm just as pleased, not to have Jim hanging about the house all the time," cried Jessie impetuously, one morning, as I stood beside her, drying the dishes while she washed them.

"He was getting on my nerves," she continued, in confessional frankness—"pottering about the house in that slow, quiet way of his . . gathering up, and laying down, to forget where he'd laid them—his tools and implements . . while his boat seemed in process of being everlastingly built."

I stood by, not putting in a word——

"And the silences he inflicts on me . . when he has a grouch on, doesn't wish to talk, and I mustn't talk either—inhibiting not small talk, but talk about poetry, books, discussions of impersonal interest in all that's happening in life! . .

"He's certainly sat on me hard——"

"Look out!" I cried, as she dropped a plate that went into bits on the floor. . .

"Oh, hell! let it break. Let them all break, for all I care!" she began to weep vehemently. . . I put one arm about her. "There! there; you poor kid!"

"It's not as if he were a strong man—but, damn him, just look at the way his chin goes back into his neck!"

"Look out! There goes another dish!"

"—He puts on a show of masterfulness—but it's my monthly story for 'The Homemaker,' my teaching Spanish each winter, that keeps me and the baby and him——

"If he was the one that supported, or half-supported, the family, I wouldn't mind so much, his spiritual and mental bullying—at least not quite so much——"

"Isn't he—hasn't he—written some fine poetry? the stuff of his that I've seen in the magazines holds great promise, Jessie . . and the novel——"

"Poetry? I used to write poetry—reams of it . . till he pooh-poohed me out of it by saying over and over again how bad it was——"

"You shouldn't have let him do that—that was *your* weakness."

"—I was writing some fine poetry, at Halcyon Hall, when he and Flatman were both trying to get me for a sweetheart—why the devil I ever chose Jim?——"

Here she caught up the baby, laid it over her lap and, while I stacked away the dishes in the cupboard, she deftly changed its diapers, putting the old one aside in a rank heap, skillfully wrapping about, and pinning securely on, a clean, sun-bleached one. . .

"I tell you, from now on, since I'm the one that's keeping this ménage on its feet—I'm going to do a little bumming, too, if I so desire!"

. . . . . .

I lay outside, behind a rock, quite out of reach of the sun-and-wind-woven grass between me and the house. I was putting down the lines of a sonnet . . lovingly . . and overlooking, at the same time, between rhymes, three valleys purple with distance. . .

I heard the sound of Jessie's fingers going on her Smith Premier . . like a horse trotting far off. . .

She was preparing her next story for "The Homemaker."

. . . . . .

Though I was supposed to pay for my keep, money was not coming in readily. I had not yet contributed a cent to the household.

"But," I assured Jessie, "The Kansas City Galaxy has a whole

bunch of my poems that they asked for, and that they've promised me to use, in their Sunday issues . . fortunately, they pay well . . unlike the usual run of papers."

But a month, six weeks, passed, and still no news from the Sunday Editor of *The Galaxy* . . then, one morning, in the rural free delivery box at the bottom of the road, I found them all—my poems—returned to me again—not one kept out for use . . the envelope had been torn and kicked about . . as if it had ignominiously trailed through all the mud from Kansas City to Hillwood. . .

And in the envelope was no explanatory letter, but an impersonal rejection-slip—from the man who had, previously, written me an enthusiastic, personal letter about those very poems. . .

Not till years later did I learn what had been wrong . . when a young newspaperman of my acquaintance who had been assistant editor of *The Galaxy* at that time gave me the explanation:

"Billy" his editor had said to him, "I've been thinking it over seriously, and there must be something wrong here! . . Gregory has either pinched these poems somewhere, or he's already sold them to magazines, and he's trying to re-sell them to us . . they're too good . .!"

Thus, from an unjust suspicion no inkling of which was manfully conveyed to me, that I might defend myself—I was deprived of what might have been for a while a small but regular income. . .

. . . . . .

That strange, spasmodically functioning thing, my conscience, was disquieted. . .

"Jessie, I'm ashamed of myself; but I'll have some money soon, or hop a freight back to New York."

"If I were in your place, I'd try hard to forget my tramping days . . I'd put them behind me once and for all. . stick around here for the rest of the summer and get some writing done! . . get down to work on that novel . .!

"Don't worry about money . . it doesn't cost anything extra, hardly, to have you here, what with the garden and the vegetables it produces, free. . ."

In a humble, expiatory manner, I did chores:

I took it upon myself to go down the rocky wood-and-meadow road to Shields' every morning, for the milk . . dallying and

thinking . . sometimes plumping down on a rock or rounded knoll of moss to jot a line that the dawning freshness of day sent into my head. . .

Jessie would heat the milk to just the right temperature, for the baby. She had fitted up a small laboratory of foods, and necessities for it . . possessing even a small library of latest research on the care and upbringing of infancy.

"When a woman has a child there's nothing like being up-to-date . . wouldn't trust my baby to an ignorant nurse. . .

"But where have you been all this while, going for that milk?—did you stop for a gossip with Shields?"

"I've just written a beautiful Petrarchan sonnet."

. . . . . .

Bender's novel was going well.

He was abandoning the lake and his beloved boat for a few days, locking himself up in an upstairs room while he finished typing the first half of his book. He opined that when Bennett Whellen had seen what was done of it, he would give him an advance. . .

"Let them pan Whellen all they will—he's more generous at helping new authors out, than all the old conservative publishers put together."

"Yes, they're mostly jealous of his literary taste and his enterprise. I think I'll stand a good chance with him"—Jim.

I asked Jim if I might use his boat while he was busy at the house. He gave me permission, if I wouldn't try to sail it, but would row it.

It was hard, rowing it, so I loafed in it, letting it drift.

But it was with me more a matter of being secluded in coves while I day-dreamed, read, wrote,—than sailing in a boat.

. . . . . .

In the shallows of Wampum Lake I discovered a species of mussel having a bluish-black shell like gun-metal. I had never seen its kind anywhere else. I speculated whether it was an edible variety. . .

I asked Jessie for a large pail . . a "water pail." . .

"You don't expect to fill a water pail with berries, do you?"

"No, but with mussels."

Jim had strolled downstairs into the kitchen where we were, in time to catch my words,—pipe in mouth, slack, large hands negligently half-thrust into trouser's pockets.

"You don't mean those queer things scattered all over the bottom of Wampum Lake, do you?"

"Yes, they're the ones."

"What do you want them for?—not as a substitute for money, I hope; even if the Indians did use them as cowrie shells."

I decided to overlook what I suspected might be a thrust at my impecuniousness. . .

"I'm gathering them for two reasons—I think they might prove good to eat, and I might find a freshwater pearl in one of them."

I had recently read in a newspaper of a man in Missouri who had found a pearl in a freshwater bivalve, on which he had realized six hundred dollars. With a stroke of similar luck I would be enabled to spend the summer at Hillwood, discharging entirely my obligations to Jessie, and have enough left over to keep me the fall and winter in New York.

Benders waxed jocose.

Jessie's eyes rayed pleasantly through the pince-nez glasses she seldom wore; "but Jim," she affirmed, standing up for me, "it's within the possibilities that Johnny might find a pearl."

Jim clumped out with a snort.

Left alone with Jessie, I determined to feel hurt.

"Jessie, did you get that crack Jim made about cowrie shells and money?"

She didn't answer, but turned to the bottle of milk that she was heating, in a pan of water, for Zelda.

"Jessie," I hesitated—"maybe I'd better leave."

"What for?"

"Jim——"

"Don't you mind Jim . . you're super-sensitive. I'm sure it was an innocent joke of his!"

. . . . . .

"What are you going to do with those books on Napoleon?"

"What? are they here, at last?"

"It must be them . . the stationmaster said to Jim several days ago that there was a heavy tin trunk full of something down at the station for you."

"Why didn't Jim tell us about them before?"

"—Forgot about it, I suppose."

"Hurray! now I can write my play on Napoleon—but if I could only find a freshwater pearl first!"

. . . . . .

I heaped up the small, bluish-black mussels in piles; my back hurt from stooping over, my legs and my hands and forearms ached intolerably, from the cold water. For the bottom of Wampum Lake was fed with chill springs that bubbled up by the dozen.

It was a groaning, sweaty job, lugging the big, heaped pail up the hill to the rock-ensconced farmhouse. . .

Womanlike, Jessie flung herself into the spirit of my adventure, quite persuaded that there might be a pearl to be found. . .

"Maybe it might fetch *several thousand dollars!* when we find it!" I calculated optimistically.

. . . . . .

The kitchen was a mess.

Jessie laid aside her potato knife. . .

"There's no use opening any more," she cried wearily, the light of play and interest fading from her eyes; she turned from the crazy girl to the practical woman. . .

"But the meat . . *that's* not to be wasted, I plan to fry that, so we can eat it to-night for supper."

"I've just chucked the mess out"—Jessie.

"There's still some left in the shell; I'll boil them whole, first, to open them easier; then extract that, and fry it." . .

Jim—wandering restlessly in and out of the kitchen. . .

"Best chuck the whole mess out and avoid the belly-ache!"

I swore that my stomach was tough enough to digest anything, after Jim had added—in his monotonous delivery——

"I've been talking with old grand-daddy Shields down at the foot of the hill. . .

"He says he remembers 'way back to when there was still a few families of Indians left in the neighborhood; when they had nothing else to eat, they cooked and ate those mussels. . .

"Old Shields himself did it, once, too, he says, and it damn near keeled him over for good. . .

"He 'allows as' only Indians could have eaten them—and then only when they had nothing else, and that they're rank poison for white folks!"

"Well, we'll see!"

Stubbornness because of Jim's wiseacre tone decided me to fry and eat them. . .

. . . . . .

Cooked, they proved sweet to the taste, and seemed wholesome.

Jessie ate a plate of them. Jim, a few mouthfuls,—myself, I devoured them in heaps.

"They taste all right, but it's the flour-and-egg batter."

"Don't be a kill-joy, Jim."

"Look at the cat, then; he's got sense."

The cat had gingerly pulled one of the wizzelled clams from the saucerful that had been set down for him . . then he had walked off, leaving it lie.

. . . . . .

We sat in the glow of the big lamp. When Benders talked he had something interesting to say. It was of Aubrey Beardsley and *The Yellow Book* that we conversed, he, for once, supplying the main burden of the discourse. . .

Listening more than saying anything—unusual for me—a queer, but agreeable sense of drowsy fullness pervaded me. . .

"—Think I'll go outside to my cot for the night;—Feel sleepy all of a sudden."

"It's a bad case of indigestion coming on, I'm afraid," said Benders, "better go outside and stick your finger down your throat."

. . . . . .

Under a big moon and a vast night scattered helter-skelter with stars, I fell into deep sleep straight like a plummet dropped over the side of a ship. . .

. . . . . .

That stertorous breathing that woke me up, was my own . . the blood seemed to be about to burst from the ends of my toes and fingers . . my hands felt so wooden they didn't seem to belong to me. . .

The cot on which I lay seemed to heave up and down as if I was on shipboard. It was my heart pounding.

The spectral appearance that the sky had taken on affrighted me. The moon hung low, stuck on a flat sky, a dead, greenish disk. I labored under the fancy that I had but to reach up to

touch it. The stars were little ovals of tinsel pinned just above me on even-stretched blue cloth. . .

The dim-seen trees and near hills crowded on me in two-dimensional "flats."

I could scarcely breathe. It was acute indigestion. Belatedly I took Jim's advice.

I lit the lantern that I kept ever ready by the chair for inspirations that might come. One came now. I jotted down the weird lines of verse.

I hate the changing-changeless moon,
The iteration of the sun,
The regularity of noon
And systems that like clockwork run;
And I would leap and clap for joy
If morn for once would enter late
His empire, like a careless boy,
And make expectant twilight wait;
And I would dance for joy, and shout,
If the sun bartered gold for green,
Or if the moon would turn about
The silver side I've never seen!

I wrote till dawn . . poem after poem . . the poem quoted above I sold to *The Smart Set*. . .

I had entitled it "Monotony." "Call it by some smart-aleck title, and *The Smart Set* will buy it," urged Jim.

"What would you suggest?"

"Try 'Boredom'."

I did . . and sold it under that title.

Another of the poems I wrote that night I sold to "*The Elite*"; one to Mason's; one to Munsey's, one to "*The Agora.*"

Five in all.

So the clams did not turn out to be so unprofitable, after all. For they brought about a bodily and mental condition that inspired me to write poems for which I collected the sum of forty dollars . . eventually. . .

An item I almost forgot:

After they had been boiled, I discovered what I took to be four black pearls in as many shells. . .

"There! Look there! didn't I tell you?" I boasted ruefully to Jim, "what rotten luck . . real pearls that have been cooked . . that might have brought over a thousand dollars!"

But Jim maintained that they were not pearls but worthless lumps of nacre.

. . . . . .

Neighbor Shields having hauled up the books on Napoleon from the station, I was put out to find the trunk, in which I had shipped them by freight, in such bad condition . . corners knocked off . . big dents in the body of it . . just short of being smashed open, that was a consolation.

It had taken, as I remember, about a month for it to arrive; "they must have sent it calling all over the country, before they decided to deliver it at its final destination."

"But what are all these tin strips for?" asked Jim.

"I knew the trunk might be in for a hard siege, so I determined to nail it securely."

"And you certainly did . . with a double dozen of tin strips borne around and around it—and this multitude of nails!"

For to make sure that the strips held, I had knocked in nail after nail, not over an inch apart . . every bit of the trunk was studded with nails. . .

"Lend me your claw-hammer, Jim."

I pulled the first nail out.

Commented Jim, observing its length with a quaint eye, as it spun to the porch:

"If the rest of the nails are of the same length, I wouldn't say much for the condition of the books inside."

His conjecture was right. There was not a book escaped torn bindings and many perforations. . .

It was more a wreck, than a consignment of books for summer study. . .

"—A pretty fine you'll have to pay the Library, for damages."

Nevertheless, I had my books, and now I would write a great play.

. . . . . .

One morning, at breakfast, a few days before Jim's departure to the City to see Bennett Whellen, with his manuscript, we took up the topic of mixed sun-bathing.

I spoke of how the Radical Germans went on sun-bathing parties in the fields, absolutely nude; I spoke of the anarchist colonies in Switzerland and in Holland that went practically naked, the year 'round, esteeming clothes the cause of all men's physical ills. . .

It was also a fact, I said, that those tribes, according to ethnologists, that went naked were the most moral, in the ascetic, accepted sense of the conventional definition of the word "morality."

I told of our sun-bathing parties up The Hudson; and of the sun-baths Darrie, Hildreth and I took down in Jersey . . about which there was nothing—outside the nudity—that Comstock himself could object to.

I was proselytizing—with missionary fervor.

"—Suppose we begin sun-bathing together, right after breakfast?"

"Yes, why not?" Jessie responded receptively.

"It's the most wonderful thing in the world for health," I urged eagerly, "and, besides, it's the Higher Decency that a better world must learn—put into practice by us, its pioneers . . pioneers in a movement to bring the world back to the æsthetic of the naked body —the Greeks——"

"You mean," asked Jim practically, "that when you lay about that way, up on the Hudson—down in Jersey, that you shared no different feelings toward each other than when you were clothed?"

"Not exactly that, but we knew we were doing something fine and radical, something emancipative from the stupid codes and conventions of ordinary life that's ashamed and afraid of the body . . there was a species of religious exaltation in that."

"That's right," Jessie agreed.

Jim directed a jealous gleam of the eyes at his mate who was agreeing with all that I said—there was a smouldering fire in his eyes——

"Few people," he pronounced, "can stand it, associating with each other so, without desiring each other . . we're not built like angels yet!"

"On the contrary," I maintained, "use and familiarity——"

"Yes, I am sure," Jessie, assisting me, "—sure it would do away with much of the present unwholesome mystery—pruriency——"

"Ultimately it would, perhaps," debated Jim gravely, "but the first result would be a loosening of all restraints, a dangerous promiscuity: but, to bring the matter home; I don't mind when others wish to experiment along that line, but"—he swept Jessie and me with his bland, brown eyes,—"I wouldn't care to have any woman that I loved expose herself so before any friend or acquaintance of mine . . that is," he continued, dryly, "if I wished to keep her much longer as a sweetheart, or him, as a friend."

"But, Jim——"

Benders went on as if I had not tried, argumentatively, to interrupt,——

"Now, if Jessie, here, and you, for instance, grew habituated to each other's bodies . . I'd expect the natural consequences . . and, if I abetted such conduct, I'd have no right to kick. . .

"Mind you, I'm not calling in question the ideals of such practices; I'm just not failing to note the probable results."

There the matter ended, though Jessie, in a hurt voice, had affirmed that, when she and Jim were alone, they went about the house naked, on hot days . . and that there was a wonderful feeling of freedom in it. . .

"Yes, that was when we were alone!" Jim replied, emphasizing the words, WE and ALONE.

. . . . . .

Benders made a mysterious to-do about his leaving for the City. He withdrew himself upstairs with Jessie for over an hour of murmuring conference . . before he and she and I sallied forth to the train,—she and I to see him off.

Just before the train gathered motion, Jim extended me a friendly, vigorous shake of the hand.

. . . . . .

Immediately a tangible weight of oppression was lifted from Jessie and from me. We laughed merrily into each other's faces; we caught each other by the hands, romping and dancing up the hillroad; we shouted to hear the echoes a certain rock gave off. . .

"It isn't that I don't love Jim——"

"Jessie, you don't need to explain; I understand."

"—But it's a relief, for a while . . now we can talk and read poetry aloud all morning, if we see fit, clear to lunch-time."

. . . . . .

The third day of our being alone together, Jessie defiantly proposed a sun-bath; she caught up the baby, clad only in its diaper, and, in nothing but a diaphanous wrapper,—her plump, symmetrical body showing through it, and her full, high breasts; her taper legs moving in shadowy silhouette—she caught me by the hand, the baby on the other arm . . I thought of MacMonnies statue of the Bacchanal that they raised such a row about, in Boston . . looking at her, she instinctively executing a few dance steps. . .

We stepped through the long grass to my great rock overhanging the valleys . . for I loved vistas from eminences. . .

I boldly cast my bathrobe aside. . .

Jessie dropped her eyes. She paused daintily in her bare feet like a cat. . .

"You stay here," she made, "and I and the baby will take the other side of the rock."

But it was difficult to talk together; difficult to read our Swinburne aloud.

"Why won't you come here and lie beside me? We can talk better, and read poetry better, seeing each other's faces . . this way it's like talking by telephone."

"Over here I can see, if some one happens to come . . besides, Jim's too jealous. And I don't care to have to lie to him, when he comes back."

"But, if he asks?——"

"I can deny that I took sun-baths with you. I can say I took them alone, with the baby. . ."

Nearly every day, when there was a good sun, we performed the same ceremony,—she inflexibly keeping to her side of the rock, so she wouldn't have to lie under Jim's questioning. . .

. . . . . .

During times of daily necessity it was my habit to carry out a book with me, reading from it instead of picking up torn newspapers and old magazines, after the popular custom!

I was deep in Swinburne's Chastelard when my meditations, one

late morning, were broken in upon by a strange, guttural cry—the primitive wail of a female in distress that I scarcely recognized as Jessie's. . .

"Johnny, O, Johnny! come quick! . . HELP!"

I ran toward the house, drawing my clothing about me as I ran. I had dropped *The Plays of Swinburne* among the old magazines and yellowed newspapers.

I shot through the kitchen, leaping swiftly into the small bedroom on the lower floor where Jessie had located Zelda's nursery, and from which the curious, frightening wail for help still emanated. . .

The baby lay on her back, gone purple-black in the face, gasping for very life-breath . . the mother kneeling above it, making strange, guttural noises of extreme animal terror. . .

"Quick! Jessie—quick! what's wrong?"

"The big safety-pin—that I used—in her diaper—she's swallowed it—OPEN!"

Again she bowed the dainty, straw-blonde head, shrilling forth more cries, more guttural moans of stricken terror. . .

. . . . . .

In the MARRIED WOMEN'S QUERY DEPARTMENT of an old, torn "Homemaker"—only the morning previous—having luckily forgotten my *Swinburne*—the magazine fortunately lying open on the floor, I had fixated my unoccupied eye on an item that now helped. . .

I flung the hysterical, small, blonde mother aside.

Like the soldier in Doré's *Solomon's Judgment*, I snatched up the child by one heel and swayed it aloft, while, with repeated, sharp blows, with the free hand I thumped it vigorously on the back. . .

In a moment it began crying in great, frightened gulps, and its face shifted from black to purple, from purple to healthier crimson.

On the floor glittered the big safety-pin, shed from its throat.

"O, thank God, thank God!" exclaimed Jessie. She had fallen on her knees. She was picking the pin up. "O! thank God . . it wasn't open after all."

"How did Zelda happen to swallow it?"

"I was changing her diapers . . I just laid the pin aside for a minute. She reached for it, shoved it in her mouth, while my mind was off somewhere else momentarily . . then I saw her face

going purple"—she dashed more tears from her eyes—but happy tears——

"Do you think she's all right now?"

For the child, lying on the bed, was bawling lustily.

"She's crying from fright, now!" explained the overjoyed mother, pressing her cheek against my hand in gratitude——

"Johnny, tell me,"—a twinkle in her eye, and more her old self—"where in the devil did you ever learn what to do with a baby that swallows a safety-pin—when you've never had any of your own?"

"—Read about it in a copy of '*The Homemaker*,' yesterday."

I was the recipient of a laughing mother's kiss of impersonal gratitude——

"You dear, old, sublime fool!" . . .

The incident brought us closer together . . into a closer understanding. . .

. . . . . .

I complained bitterly and often of my solitary, mateless condition. . .

"—If I didn't love Jim so much!" Jessie attested . . and, once or twice, almost in a tone of apology—"Maybe it's a woman's natural duty, when a man for whom she has affection—suffers! . ."

. . . . . .

And——

"O, you men!" she exclaimed, once again,—"you men, you, who talk so loud and long about the dependence of women; you're far more dependent on us, than we, on you! . .

"You males are the true dependent sex. . .

"If nature didn't compel us to bear your children in our bodies for nine months, and, after that suckle them, and play handmaid to them for years, you'd find out how independent we could be!

"How weakest of the weak you men are—till WE foolishly give in!

"If all women only understood the power they have over men, the homeliest of them—their absolute power . . as the great courtesans of history understood it . . there'd be a different tale to tell."

"What do you mean? where lies the woman's power over man that you're boasting about?"

"It lies in just holding out against a man's elementary sexual

need," she answered, "by just holding out against you, you'd all come crying to us like babies."

"You mean—something like Aristophanes Lysistrata?"

"Yes, but like the women in that play, we take pity on you too soon . . because you appeal to the Infernal Maternal in us; there's where you capture us. . .

"For there are two babies born with each childbirth: the child, and the husband that begot the child . . equally they have to be coddled and allowed for."

. . . . . .

One morning, Jessie said——

"Johnny, last night I had a curious dream that repeated itself I don't know how many times, a guest that hesitated to depart . . I dreamed you were suffering too much for me to bear . . and I was scurrying all about the country to find and bring back a mate for you—looking under haystacks, through fields, searching among trees . . I woke, finding my cheeks wet with tears I'd shed for you."

. . . . . .

But it was not all sex that we discussed. It was seldom that. Mostly our minds and speech were occupied with the great poets. And we read our own verse to each other.

Jessie frankly did not like most of my work.

"Though perhaps you're not consciously aware of it, the immediate editorial needs of the magazines are indirectly dominant, when you write your verse, subtly deflecting the flow of your inspiration into acceptable channels."

I vehemently denied her strictures.

"In other words, I write only such verse as the magazines can use?"

"No, can't you understand, I have not charged you with doing that? The process is far more subtle. . .

"The curse of the American poet lies in his finding a ready market for rhymes that keep within the conventional themes, in the popular magazines. That's what keeps him a minor poet, or finally turns him into an advertising man."

"On the contrary, the magazines help a poet——"

She did not even attempt to rebutt my last declaration, but proceeded——

"Now the English poet excels instantly over the American because he hasn't a ready market for mediocre rhymes . . it's the best or nothing, for him——"

To test the validity of Jessie's judgment, I tried a trick on her . . she had boasted that she could tell the poetry of an Englishman from that of an American immediately. . .

I tried to palm off on her, as mine, a sonnet of Arthur Christopher Benson, entitled

The Grasshopper

"Rest, rest, impatient heart, thou dost not know
What 'tis thou seekest. Wilt thou hurl away
For petty praise, a little gilded show,
The lavish treasure of the golden day?
Yon grasshopper in green enameled mail,
With waving whisks and blunted nose upthrust,
Draws whizzing thighs athwart his plated tail,
Or trails his belly in the sun-warmed dust,

Or leaps among his fellows, caring not
Which leaps the highest, which the braver drest;
With solemn face his edged jaws crossing slow,
He clips the succulent salad, gives no thought
That soon the clouds will gather from the West
And all the high hill-pastures ache with snow."

"You never in the world wrote that sonnet, you faker! give it me!" She snatched the copy out of my hand.

"Only an Englishman who was a scholar would write 'clips the succulent salad' in relation to a grasshopper——

"I'll bet you don't know that the word, as used here, means something else beside a dinner-course served with some kind of dressing . . it means an English plant named 'burnet'," she smiled wisely, "try me with something harder, Johnny." She paused——

"Though you might have written the line about 'the high hill pastures' that 'ache with snow,'" she admitted, "that *gives* me the thrill you sometimes bring with a chance phrase of yours, when

you're excited over an idea and have forgotten yourself, for the time being."

"Do I—really—talk that way—sometimes?" I was a-gape for praise.

"Once in a very great while. But it wouldn't be right for you, in your present callow state of personal development, to hit upon the thing unerringly . . as a matter of conscious art . . it's God's compensation that, mostly, you talk like an ass."

. . . . . .

"—Haven't heard from Jim for more than a week; I wonder if there's anything that has gone wrong with him, down there in the City!"

"What could possibly have gone wrong with him?"

"—Might have gotten run over, or something . . he's such a fool, walking along with his beak up in the air, not paying attention to anything but what he's thinking of!"—vaguely and fondly.

Jim Benders had written the day of his arrival, that he was putting up at Mrs. Nough's, in the identical room I had occupied. Mrs. Nough sent "the crazy poet" her "best regards" he added, in a postscript . . since then he had not sent a line. . .

"Don't be so general, Jessie,—what could have gone wrong?" I asked again, since she looked worried. . .

"When two bucks like Jim and 'Red' Flatman get together——"

"You couldn't suspect?——"

"All men are erotic tramps."

. . . . . .

Now Jim and I, several days previous to his leaving for New York, had had a long, frank talk apart, as only Radicals could have, concerning Jessie:

Did I, Jim had asked, feel at all drawn toward his mate?—would it be safe, he put it to me frankly,—to leave us together?

"Jim!" I had exclaimed a trifle insincerely, "if Jessie really loves you——"

Benders, cutting in, executed an impatient brushing motion with his hands, as if brushing a cobweb aside that obstructed his path——

"Johnny, don't beg the question; you know, as well as I, that,

whether a woman loves a man or not has little to do with the question of fidelity. . .

"Every man who's in love with a woman ought to stop blinding himself sentimentally to the fact that there are times—weaker moments!" he paused thoughtfully, eloquently . . removing his fedora that he was going to wear into Town, and scratching his thinning brown hair, at its thinnest, on the crown, carefully, with the nail of one finger. . .

"On the other hand, a man, in spite of the popular belief, has no excuse beyond his will, for not being strong. . .

"Whereas a woman's so constituted physiologically, that she often—doesn't quite know what she's about——"

"In plain words, Jim, if you think I oughtn't to stay on——"

Again the frank, level regard of pleasant, practical brown eyes.

"No. I'm glad to have you here, to keep Jessie company. I wish to spend a month, absolutely alone, down in the City, busying myself continuously at writing—without a woman to distract me, without even a solid woman like Jessie——

"You're a God-send, *if I can trust you* . . otherwise I'd have to shut up house, fetch her and the baby to the City with me—find a separate room——"

"Beyond the isolation, what has she to be afraid of, *alone*, up here?"

"Last year it would have been all right. But this summer, about five miles down the line, there's a big gang of Italian laborers on the job, putting through the new inter-urban street-railway . . at night they might be roaming afield——"

"Hasn't she the shotgun behind the door?"

"Yes, and I've taught her how to use it," a look of unconscious personal admonition came from him,—at which I smiled and evoked a smile from him in return . . then his mind drifted back to the alien labor again, "but she might get too scared, at a pinch, to use it at all!"

In a deep voice of solemn adjuration——

"So if you, man to man, feel that you can trust YOURSELF not to—" he laid his hand in friendliness, on my shoulder—"trust yourself . . not to try to put . . anything into her head—" he jerked out the dislocated sentence, embarrassed. . .

At last I was nettled. Before I could check myself, I asked him caustically——

"But you? how about yourself, when you're in town, alone?"

"—A fair question," he replied calmly; "it stands to reason I'll be true to her . . I've much work to do . . and I've been growing up, these last few months,—thinking things over deeply. . .

"It's not that I don't feel stray impulses, but I've arrived at the conclusion that monogamic love and an orderly, settled life, is best for a man who has serious work in view, achievement that requires continuous application. . .

"Did you ever hear of Don Juan's doing anything in a creative way?—writing a poem, or painting a picture worth while?"

He waved his hand expressively, a flaring match held between his fingers in the quiet air, in his interest delaying to light his waiting pipe. . .

"Jessie and I are fairly compatible . . and we've got a child. . .

"It's a case, now, of keeping our lives intelligently adjusted. . .

"True, the first ecstasy's gone . . but we still have the quiet comfort of mutual companionship."

. . . . . .

In the middle of the night I was aroused by a grating noise downstairs.

It was repeated, after intervals of silence. . .

"What could that be?" I wondered sleepily . . I turned over again, dropping my head back on the pillow— "O, it's Jessie up tending to the baby," I explained to myself.

I was sleeping inside, upstairs, that night. Outside, it had threatened rain early in the evening. . .

I started awake. The noise was repeating itself. It couldn't be the baby. It was not crying. I listened, intent.

In a moment, Jessie stood outside my door, calling to me in a hushed voice—"Johnny, there's some one downstairs trying to break in."

I leaped out of bed, unclothed. I tiptoed down the stairs as I was, she following close. . .

"Here!" for the first time I noticed she had been carrying something up to me. But it was, of all things, a broken baseball bat, not the shotgun!

I began shouting, as if from outside myself— "Hey, beat it, you dirty ——! . . beat it, quick, you ——, if you don't want your ——brains knocked out!" in emphatic reinforcement of my threats I smacked the bat violently with a big noise against the wall, and, higher up, against the low ceiling, bringing down a rush of loosened plaster over our heads and shoulders. . .

"Stop it! don't knock the house down—you've scared whoever it was—away!"

We heard feet full of fright verging swiftly off, running swishingly through the long grass, stumbling down the stony road.

"Where in hell's the shotgun?" I lusted to shoot into the marauder, though it was no longer necessary. . . "Fetch the shotgun quick, and I'll run after him."

I itched to let off both barrels at once with a great detonation, promiscuously into the general night. . .

"If I'd only got just one crack at that!— . ."

"It's lucky you were here."

"But why wasn't it the shotgun you brought to me?"

"I took out the shells the day Jim left, and stowed them away."

"Say, Jessie, he didn't leave that gun for marauders alone, did he?" In trying to smile, I affected a hideous grimace of concern.

"For God's sake," she answered evasively, "run up and put on some clothes."

I was aware for the first time that I had been strutting around naked as a woodpecker, while she wore a diaphanous white nightgown that had somehow in the excitement been all but torn off.

The baby waked and cried. She rushed in to soothe it.

. . . . . .

I received a letter from Janice. In it she told how she was adopting from an orphan asylum a child who was a member of the Jukes Family—those aristocrats of degeneracy and crime.

She had hesitated, she wrote, between the Jukes and The Kallikak Families . . had discovered a member of the former readier at hand. She has chosen a girl-child. For the future of the world would belong to young women.

Her adopted child was named Constance.

She was going to prove, through her, that the laws of heredity

were mostly nonsense; but that, if in any measure, they were valid, a proper environment would prove stronger.

"The child shall never find out where she came from . . five years old, already she's as clever as a bright girl of fourteen . . pretty, too, and everywhere and in everything, at one jump, like Puck."

Janice concluded by registering a vow that, by freeing Constance, early, from all prejudice and by giving her every educational and cultural advantage, she would make her one of the great feminist leaders of the coming generation.

"Of course you could find the comical in what Janice writes, but I'm FOR her!" Jessie commented, "though, without knowing it," she qualified, "she's much too prone to meddle with other people's personal affairs."

. . . . . .

I noticed a slight pucker of trouble between Jessie's eyes, when she learned that the letter was postmarked "New York," and that Janice had run down from Curlew Island to adopt Constance and fetch her back with her. . .

Mrs. Nough's, where Jim was staying, was a block around the corner from Janice's apartment. . .

. . . . . .

"I'm taking my bike and riding in to Ridgely this morning," Jessie informed me, at the breakfast table, "there's a few needments I must buy, and I have to send a telegram to Jim, asking him what's the matter that I haven't heard from him this week . . it's mighty queer."

"You're worried about Janice and Jim's being so close to each other?"

"No," she lied, "it's not that . . Jim's a free agent——"

"It's absurd to worry about Janice . . she wouldn't keep an intimacy with Jim secret . . she'd write you immediately, in order to be fair."

"As if that would do any good, you booby . . but, to change the subject, I suppose it's safe to leave the baby on your hands for the day? . . you'll take good care of her, won't you, Johnny?"

"Of course I will."

"Aren't you the four-flusher, talking of living in a tower, all alone, devoting your life to poetry?——

"Why, you'd make a corking father! . .

"And, some day, when you find that glorious red-headed girl you're always telling me about! . ."

. . . . . .

Jessie's very delicate, fine, blonde-spun hair shone in the sunlight, blowing in escaping wisps, as she dropped down the hill, feet gaily up, letting the bicycle gather momentum. . .

"Don't forget the baby's milk!" she called back, over her shoulder. . .

"I won't! Don't worry!" I responded, with a wave of the hand.

So I was left alone with the baby.

I couldn't help feeling proud of being entrusted with the child.

. . . . . .

"—That elderberry wine in the closet—help yourself to a couple of glasses of it, if you think they'll give you the inspiration for a poem . . while I'm gone."—Jessie had bidden. . .

One evening Jessie had trotted out her home-made elderberry wine as a surprise, and the three of us had sat in front of the fire, having a glass or two around . . and Jim, unbending under its influence, became mellow-loquacious, and talked beyond his measure. . .

Afterward Jessie had observed proudly, "Wasn't Jim wonderful, last night?" and I assured her that indeed he had been—"Jim's the kind that ought always to have a drink in him, to be at his best, to break down his hindering reticences."

. . . . . .

I brought out the big jar of elderberry wine and placed it on the table where I had set my typewriter, that was still unpaid-for.

I fetched a glass and filled it to the brim, so that I had to place my lips to the standing glass to prevent the wine's spilling over.

"A good, full glass! . . now for a poem!"

But I had sipped the tumbler to the bottom before I'd gotten the vestige of a lyric idea.

"Wine does no good as an inspiration, unless there's the idea simmering there first," I thought.

Then I wondered where the baby was, reminding myself that I was responsible for it for a whole day. . .

Finally I found it outside, going on all fours along the porch where we ate our breakfasts . . reaching down and over at a bright, flaunting bed of nasturtiums . . I snatched it back as it teetered on the verge of a four-foot drop.

"Come on, little teddy bear! I'm to be your daddy for to-day!"

I plumped her down in the middle of the kitchen floor . . shutting the door that led to the front porch and the alluring nasturtiums, and securing the back door that led to the tall grass of a small field that itself led to a fifty-foot drop into a neighboring meadow. . .

. . . . . .

A ballade, an appeal to Bennett Whellen for more money—advance on a projected book of poetry to be entitled "I Am Youth" —that would be the stuff!

I knew Whellen had enough of the whimsical in him to advance me a hundred, if my ballade appealed to him. . .

. . . . . .

I had neglected the more involved forms of verse—the rondeau, sestina, triolet, ballade, ballade redouble, pantoum. . .

Jessie was enamored of them, despite the popularity of free verse . . she possessed Gleeson White's books on those forms . . together, we set to work practicing these exotic forms, for the sake of poetic craftsmanship. . .

. . . . . .

Now just what would fetch that hundred dollars from Whellen? . .

I had it—something after the manner of Villon . . since Whellen, in common with others, must needs visualize me as "the vagabond poet," thanks to the young newspaperman, Waters, who dubbed me that, when dropping out of a boxcar, I first put in an appearance, at Laurel University . . an appellation that was to stick to me all through my subsequent career!

"Come now," I said to myself, "let's compress all the wistful appeal, all the romanticism, of the vagrant, the Bohemian literary man, in a ballade, to be written, in personal appeal, to Whellen . . it'll flatter his egotism."

ABABBCCDCD ABABBCCDCD ABABBCCDCD—I drafted the rhyme-scheme on a separate sheet of paper . . CCDCD, the Envoy:

PLAINT OF THE VAGABOND POET, TO BENNETT WHELLEN

I sicken of the campfire's glow
Which turns a ghost before the day;
The leaf that dawdles to and fro
Soon changes green for graveyard grey
Though for a while it lift and play
Clothed like a king in gold and red. . .
Cast into jails, unhoused, half-fed,
How can I climb (though I be fain
Of stars that beckon overhead)
To heights the master-minds attain?

. . . . . .

I had not had such a hard time during my tramp-life . . got along fairly well and with little rough treatment . . excepting for a slight jail experience in Texas, and one or two others. . . I had seldom gone without a meal . . all I had to do, when hungry, was to hit a backdoor for a hand-out, when I was invariably successful. . .

But it was the Jack London-Maxim Gorky fashion of the day to heap Pelion on Ossa of suffering and obscure persecution of the migrant . . and I must make the best of the mode.

. . . . . .

Before I was aware of her presence, the baby had made her way in, an all-foured little animal . . bringing herself to a teetering, standing posture by my typewriter, one of her hands foul of the ribbon, automatically closed over it. . . "Da Da Ga Ga Ga!" she chortled, pulling the ribbon out in a long streel. . .

"Baby, how did you get in?"

I saw that I had left the door that led from the kitchen to the dining-room open . . lifting her up. . .

"Back you go, Zelda, till I've finished my ballade."

. . . . . .

Sipping yet another glass of wine, I went on—

The moving sees where great winds blow
I love indeed, yet I gainsay
Those slant-stacked ships that smoking go
And leave behind a foamy way. . .
A bull-necked captain to obey

Or mate that leaves no curse unsaid—
Such is the life by seamen led
Despite the dreams romancers feign;
And who can climb, with heart of dread,
To heights the master-minds attain?

. . . . . .

The preternatural baby was in again, interrupting me . . how she managed it I cannot remember, but once more she was pulling out the ribbon . . then she plumped down, crawling off . . swearing, I gathered the ribbon in. . .

Zelda's diaper had, during her maneuvers, brought itself out of its pins, and, to my wine-affected eyes, it trailed like a white ship's wake behind her. . .

Lifting her up—"come, my little ship,—and please stay where I put you for a while," I expostulated, "dear Future of the race of women!"

But I mustn't shut the door totally against her, in the kitchen; I must, in a measure, keep an eye on her. . .

I proceeded with the ballade:

The burnt-out lamp that gutters low
Casts on a songless page its ray,
Nor can the poet, drawn with woe,
To penury and want a prey,
In his cold attic build that lay
That lives when he who sang is dead;
A thousand worries throng, instead,
The gloomy twilight of his brain. . .
How can one rise, sore-pinched for bread,
To heights the master-minds attain?

. . . . . .

The baby was with me again. I noticed her diaper needed changing. . .

Pursuing Jessie's previous instructions, slowly, inebriately exact I changed it for her. . .

When I deposited her on the kitchen floor this time, it was with an impatient thump so surprising to the child, that she gasped, but didn't cry. . .

Speaking to her, with vinous solemnity, as if she were a grown-up:

"Now, Zelda, dear, please stay put till I finish my Envoy to the poem."

L'Envoy

Thus I, to mighty visions wed,
Drop twenty shafts before they're sped,
Shoot twenty more that fly in vain. . .
Nor may I climb, though greatly led,
To heights the master-minds attain!

. . . . . .

"There, that'll fetch you, Mister Whellen, sitting there on your swivel chair . . one foot crossed high over your knee, like the Degas Ballet Dancer—your windows all blowing wide open!

"It's as pretty a piece of balladry as Villon himself ever wrote," I blindly and believingly boasted to myself, "and if you fellows insist on visualizing me as the wild, rough-neck tramp, writing by a gift like Blind Tom's playing the piano, instead of seeing me as I am, a sensitive literary man able to read the classics in their respective languages—have at you! . . why shouldn't I make capital of your error?"

But the baby was wailing grievously. And I leapt to my feet dizzily, with the realization that I had failed to bring the morning milk up for it. . .

. . . . . .

Milk pail in hand, I stumbled hilariously down the slope of road that wound through grey rocks and protuberant boulder-lifted splotches of grass. . .

Half-way down hill I stumbled upon a visual miracle:

There stood, scarce fifty yards ahead, a beautiful buck deer, his superb antlers branching . . momentarily stopped by curiosity of me, to a splendid statue. . !

"Sh . . ! be quiet . . ! hush, be still as any mouse, there's a baby in our house," I talked to myself in vinous half-inconsequence. "By God, Poet, stop! look! There's glory for your damned eyes!"

Obsessed with the determination to get near enough to the animal to pat him with my hands, I flung myself flat, creeping toward the

astonished creature that took on just enough motion to slowly veer his head in my direction. . .

"Don't move!" I called softly, coaxingly. "If you only knew how beautiful you looked, you'd keep that pose forever.

"Wait a minute; I won't hurt you; I want to pat you!"

The deer determined it had better run. It flowed forth from its attitude of stone, into graceful motion . . talk about Greek dancing! . . it soared off like a bird, lifting, poising, dropping—floating over the low, straggling stone fences, vanishing at last among the dwarf pines of a nearby swamp—with a last, defiant, whitish flicker of an upright, jaunty tail.

"Hey! Stop! Wait!" I now bellowed at the top of my voice, running after it pell-mell for the space of a pasture-lot.

. . . . . .

"Johnny, do you know what?—you're very drunk!

"Come on! Brace up!

"You mustn't let the Shieldses catch on."

I pulled myself together, and, erect and dignified, traversed the remainder of the road to Neighbor Shields' farmhouse, saying over and over to myself—"God, but that deer was beautiful! Some day I'll give him immortality in a poem."

. . . . . .

"Baby, here's your milk, at last."

The hungry little creature protruding her under-lip, seized the bottle greedily into her hands . . nearly choking herself in her hunger.

. . . . . .

Having mailed my ballade-appeal to Whellen, I lay about the rest of the day, reading Rose's Life of Napoleon. . .

The drama of Christ and Napoleon, colossal lords of war and peace, walked in grandeur down the corridors of my mind—a work, that, like so many others, I never got down on paper. . .

"Johnny, didn't I tell you you'd make a fine father!" remarked Jessie, acclaiming the paternal virtues she thought she saw in me.

"I'm a bit tired," she continued, "—think I'll have a drink of that elderberry wine myself, to brace me up. . .

"Why, you rascal, half of it's gone . . and it was nearly full,—you don't mean to say?"—she looked in surprise toward me. . .

"Yes, I confess—I drank much more than you said I could—but look at the fine ballade it caused me to write."

. . . . . .

"You made quite a hit with old Shields—says he never heard such fine talk in his life . . he doesn't know that all the while you were probably drunk on my elderberry wine."

I replied, obscurely jealous—"Haven't I as much right to be eloquent on a few drinks, as Jim?"

. . . . . .

The day Jessie had left for Ridgely, to make a few purchases and send a telegram to Jim, a letter had come from the latter, and Jessie, on reaching home, was relieved to learn that Janice had returned to Curlew Island, taking her adopted child, little Constance, with her. . .

"I think I was a fool, sending the telegram to Jim."

But in a few days more, she was again worrying about not hearing from him. . .

"But it's not that I'm jealous . . on the contrary, sometimes I think that it's just what he needs, a discreet, sensible affair with another woman."

"Do you think you could abide it's happening?"

"If he didn't tell me about it . . and other people didn't find out . . my vanity, I suppose!"

"You're tied tighter to Jim than you realize."

"You don't know how it binds a woman to a man, to have a child by him."

"Is that true of all women, do you think?"

"No; there are a larger number of women than the conventional world suspects, of whom it is not true . . but it's true of me."

. . . . . .

Again Jessie was happy . . radiantly so . . a very long letter had come, from Jim, cheery, and indubitably full of good will and affection. . .

"He says the City's awfully hot . . but he doesn't add a word about when he's coming back."

"I suppose that means he's liable to drop in on us when we least expect him."

"I don't think so . . if you mean that he's planning to surprise

us—what good would that do, when there's nothing between us, to surprise?"

"How could he know that?"

. . . . . .

I thrust my head up over my side of the rock.

"That's the second time you've asked me to repeat that verse."

"Browning's hard to get, by the reading voice."

"I'm coming over there beside you."

"No, I can hear you just as well where you are."

"Don't be prudish; let me come over and share your place with you."

I stepped around the rock beside her.

Seeing me standing high over her, she gave a sharp, involuntary squeal; she drew the baby protectively against her body, at the same instant gathering a corner of the blanket on which she had been lying, up over her. . .

"There's a good Johnny," she coaxed, "do go back to where you were, or we can't go on with this!

"Don't spoil the innocent fun we're having, the freedom we're enjoying."

If the other man's baby had not been between us, I'm sure I would not have so readily given in . . which was the reason, I conjectured, why the ruddy, pretty little woman had brought out the child with her. . .

For there was a tension increasing between us, as if in the very air,—a subtle dissatisfaction that began to break into our eager discussions, our reading of the poets together, our bouts-rimes, making them fretful and fragmentary.

Jessie's stock expression, said over and over, would be—

"God, if only something exciting would happen!"

But this wish would be delivered in no tone of personal invitation, but as, rather, an intense, but general emotion . . and in recognition of our strange, increasing restlessness.

. . . . . .

The unease sitting between us was of that unspoken, artificially repelling force that was liable, at any moment, to make a shift, and, at one lightning-flash of proximity, bring us together in exquisite, physical contact. . .

I knew in my heart, and she knew in her heart, that the slightest motion of willing on her part—of least acquiescence, would kindle the emotional conflagration. . .

I saw how careful she was not to bring about that contact, nor to give occasion for that lightning-flash of fusion. . .

But several times I saw also that she doubted whether she should not—whether it would not be better to relieve that tension that was growing into a boredom, not slack and general, but a bitter, intense boredom of emotion and passion bridled with extreme difficulty!

. . . . . .

She clasped her hands to her head.

"Have you a headache?"

"No . . but God, let's do something to stir up things, to-night!"

"What shall we do?"

"Something! . . anything!"

Here again not the slightest personal connotation. . .

"But what is there to do? I——"

"No; I don't want to write any more bouts-rimes . . and I don't want to talk any more about literature. . .

"Let's go on a rampage!

"Can't you suggest something?"

"If we were only in town we'd run up to "The Menagerie" where those caged Irishmen are, sitting about in lion and tiger and bear-skins . . and dance!"

"But, as we're not in town——"

"How about a long walk? There'll be a fine moon to-night."

She gave a gesture of impatience at the suggestion.

"We could end with a swim at the other end of the lake where the water's warmer—where all those springs don't bubble up."

An indifferent shrug of the shoulders.

"Why must you fight off our being natural together?" (By that I meant swimming naked in the moonlight), "Jim needn't ever know."

"Needn't ever know? he'd read it in our eyes, even that unconventional trifle of behavior . . but, if I cared for you—" she paused, toying with her idea—"besides, Jim's right . . people who grow familiar with the sight of each other's bodies must inevitably——" she left unexpressed what had no need of continuance in words.

"Well, suppose—suppose even that happened," I spoke bolder, "what of it?"

. . . . . .

I had all I could do not to snatch her into my embrace . . but I saw that she would not be willing, though her body might yield. . .

"O, hell . . I wish I didn't have any physiology," I cried.

A heavy, hot moon came up and swayed outside the window for us, above dark tree-masses. It swayed there, like a swollen captive balloon that might momently burst into huge flame.

The night grew full of heat and the drone of infinite armies of insects were drumming everywhere. . .

"Come on!" she leaped up with corybantic energy. We had been sitting apart, brooding . . "come on, let's go somewhere."

"I'm game for anything," I answered hoarsely, with quivering passion deepening my voice . . "wait till I see how the baby is!" she tiptoed into Zelda's room, tiptoed out——

She was pressing her hands convulsively against her breasts. . .

"What's the matter?" I asked, apprehensive. . .

"I'd like to scream! I'd like to run through the woods, under the trees—screaming."

I stood tense, unspeaking.

"Come on!" she caught me by the wrist, gave a jerk, literally pulled me out of doors. We were soon across a field at great speed.

We sat down on top of a hill.

I was about to take her into my arms, but she forestalled me by leaping up to her feet. . .

"Johnny, remember those two barns we saw the other day, close together on the hill?"—pushing me back. . .

A devil seemed to enter into her, or the soul of a mænad . . her eyes glowed in the dark, like little lamps.

"You mean those two barns we passed, day before yesterday, when we were out for a walk?"

"Yes, they're right off the road, on the further boundary of old Shields' property."

"There couldn't be any live stock in them?" I hedged, cautiously, with a forerunning sense of what was coming. . .

"No . . and they're standing there, abandoned and ramshackle, and crammed from top to bottom with old hay, dry as a puffball,"

she was lyric; then she added, "they aren't much use, you know."

She was waiting on my assent, to make me an equal participant in the impending deed. She had not long to wait. I sprang to my feet, frenzied, a-caper.

"Sure . . you mean—set them on fire?"

"And then we can run off to higher ground and watch them slowly reddening, wider and wider, till they beat the light of the moon. . .

"—and hear the rattle of the farmers' wagons, coming from far and near, to put it out . . or, since they're worthless, to see that the flames don't spread.

"And the fool roosters in all the valley round will set up a great crowing, thinking it's dawn."

We grappled harmlessly, turkey-trotting in our happy excitement.

. . . . . .

"Then, to-morrow morning, knowing in our hearts who did it—we can both go down to the Shieldses for the milk, and hear all the talk about it, all the gossip . . their 'reckoning' and their 'guessing' what caused it."—Jessie.

" 'Spontaneous combustion'," I said.

" 'Tramps.' "—Jessie.

"*Two tramps*," I whooped, thwacking her between the shoulders.

Interlocking our hands, all emotional danger taken over into a common spirit of mischief, we hurried back to the house, and I stuffed a box of safety matches into my pants pocket. . .

"We'd better not follow the road around; a short-cut would be best, through this field of bushes and trees, then on through the woods . . if any one should happen to run into us, any one going along the road at the same time,—we might, afterward, fall under suspicion."

"Preposterous, Jessie!"

"I tell you, it's not! . . you can't ever guess what people would conjecture; especially as we'd emanate a psychic something, by the very intent in our hearts."

. . . . . .

Since we were about to furnish our own conflagration, the moon swiftly diminished its wide, red refraction to ordinary lunar proportions.

But it was still on the side of our adventure, shedding over boulder-strewn stumpy uplands and sloping underbrush a light scarcely less than dawn presents before the sun itself comes up. . .

Stumblingly picking our path—it was dark enough when we gained the trees—at times clutching each other's arms for support in spite of the lantern the moon held for us.

Jessie chattered excitedly, nervously: about poetry; about herself; her student days; her subsequent life when she was secretary for Penton Baxter at Halcyon Hall . . she spoke much about her present days with Jim and about "Red" Flatman, who was one day to be the author of the great book "Commercial Street," satirical of the dullness and stupidity of life in the small town. . .

The summer previous, as I have told before, "Red" Flatman and the Scandinavian critic, Workmann, had both visited at Hillwood. . .

And Flatman, aping and japing in the small town manner ever natural to him (though afterward to become its chief satirist), had made up this parody on the Merry Widow, which he sang again and again to Jessie—anent Jim:

"Put arsenic in his coffee
Or strychnine in his tea:
And when you are a merry widow
Think of me!"

While prattling forth this silliness, in an engagingly childlike way, Jessie stumbled over a rock . . I picked her up . . next we waded through a lush, wet pasturage of cranberry. . .

"Jesus, these mosquitoes are awful!" we slapped right and left,—they swarming up in clouds in our faces. . .

"They say they have mosquitoes bad up in the Klondike, in the short Arctic summer . . Jack London writes of strong men crying from their persistent torture. . ."

"Let's sit down and rest a bit . . they haven't followed us here . . lucky they can't go far without the wind's helping. . ."

"Are you tired? . . I'm not tired at all," I boasted,—"have I been going too fast?"

"A little bit . . I'm what you call dumpy—have short legs . . if I had long legs like you——" she breathed heavily.

We perched high on a boulder. She longed for a smoke . . luck-

ily I had stuffed some cigarettes in my pocket . . "Give me a light."

. . . . . .

And now we plunged into a deep, night forest. It was crammed thick with undergrowth. Going into it was like going down into a cave.

"I've never seen this woods before," said Jessie, puzzled. . .

"I'll go in front and push the bushes aside," I volunteered.

"Be careful how you let those twigs snap back . . one of them just missed my eye."

. . . . . .

We could hardly glimpse the moon any more because of the thickness of the leaves overhead . . only a shaft of light now, and, after a while, again, coming down through branchy interstices.

Lost, no doubt about it . . milling around and around, too. Here was the same place again where lay the phosphorescent, rotten log, the slippery, fleshy fungi growing out of it like deformed ears. . .

"I'm almost exhausted," Jessie confessed in a matter-of-fact tone.

"But do let's keep forging ahead. We must fight out to somewhere, and the sooner the better."

"Absurd, to be lost in a few acres of wood-lot."

"We didn't count on these briars and brambles."

What was evidently a deer crashed off. . .

Then my ears detected a strong, throaty sound that sent shivers up and down my spine . . what kind of animal was that?

I looked about quickly, where Jessie had slumped down at my heels, in flat collapse. She was in hysterics. . .

"I'm completely done up. You leave me here, and go to the Shieldses for help. They'll know how to locate me."

Suddenly I was afraid to go on alone, without companionship.

"No, I mustn't leave you—come on, stand up and make another try." I lifted her bodily to her feet, but she slumped down again; "no, let me rest a bit longer"; rather shamefacedly dashing the tears from her eyes and looking up, "I'm not afraid; I'm tired to death . . this damned, clinging woman's dress . . it clutches about my legs, trips me up, and it's so flimsy it's no protection against the thorns . . you have a cinch, wearing thick pants—wish you had this dress

on to see what it was like, for five minutes, you old—!!"—forcing jocularity. . .

"—Once again!"

I offered to bring her to her feet.

"Not just yet. . only a minute longer."

"Shall I carry you?"

"All right," laughing desperately, "if you can. I'm pretty solid."

I tugged heavily, lifting her up. I strained every muscle across my abdomen. A flash of pain gave me the fear that I had ruptured myself. . .

She was certainly solid, what there was of her.

I staggered and stumbled on and on with Jessie in my arms . . we poured sweat in the swelter of the close woods . . our bodies were hot and wet and stuck together. . .

A stick went between my legs, thrusting itself upward, malignantly animate . . my hold on her began to sag. . .

"Let me down. I thought you were strong."

But it was too late. I reeled down an unseen slope, not able to regather myself into balance. . .

"O, Christ Jesus, what a man!" she cried, as we fell over a series of rocks, slippery, but fortunately adequately cushioned with moss. . .

We crawled lamely and laboriously apart . . slowly we rose to our feet. We sat apart, sullen, neither of us saying a word. . .

Finally Jessie spoke up irritably. . .

"Jim could have easily carried me out of here in his arms."

"Jim could like hell!"

I had not proven as strong as I thought I had been. And the comparison between me and Jim had touched a sore spot.

. . . . . .

Luckily for us, at this immediate juncture an auto horn sounded, seeming like a miracle. . .

We stopped, looked at each other, laughed in great relief.

"Why, Jessie, what Jackasses we are—here's the State Road, right next to us!"

But it took one more concentrated hell of plunging and flailing through a last fortress of rending and ripping briar . . when we fell bodily out onto the State Road. . .

"Last time I'll ever try to take a short-cut at night!"

. . . . . .

A spring at our very noses, that ran through a pipe into a mossy, half-sunk barrel. . .

We drank in long draughts, as work-horses do.

"I feel better."

"So do I."

"I know where we are. I know where our house is, from here."—Jessie.

"But have we given up what we started out for?"

"Not by a damn sight," swore Jessie, in energy of resolution a cameo Emma Silverman, though Jessie was pretty where Emma was heroically plain. . .

"We'll burn those barns down, if it takes us all night!"

Off again we doggedly trudged, Jessie's indomitable, jocose self brimming from her again——

"See! the moon's still on the side of our mischief."

. . . . . .

"There it goes!"

"I don't see anything yet," I answered.

"But I say I see it—look!" she pointed.

"I can't see a thing."

"Let's go higher up the hill. . .

"By God, if it didn't catch," stormed Jessie, vibrating with aliveness from heel to head—"we'll go right back and start it again—and be sure, *this* time!"

But it proved not necessary to retrace our steps.

First, a soft, scarcely distinguished light . . following it swiftly, a sure but small gleam, steadily, softly expanding. . .

Soon up it soared, with a rush and a roar, on great red wings . . lighting everything about . . one of the barns was going grandly. . .

Then, in a twin, faster flame, the other barn caught, striving emulously for the same height of flame its companion was waving high . . the double conflagration, soon fusing into one, lighted up the whole east.

"Hurray! Hurray!"

Jessie danced wildly, I leaped about—whooping, both of us . . mænad and faun. . .

We stopped our racket as suddenly, remembering we might be noticed, by God knows whom, but by somebody!

Quietly we sat, almost whispering . . awe falling over us. . .

"Isn't it lovely!——"—Jessie.

"—magnificent . . say, mustn't Nero have had a grand time, burning Rome down!"

"Remember that poem of Leopardi's, in which he wishes he was Fire—perhaps rushing on red wings just like that . . wishes he was Fire, so he could burn up the whole stupid world?"

. . . . . .

The chickens began crowing from all parts of the country. This seemed very funny to us, especially as we had prophesied they would.

From all parts of the country, too—from the moon-glimmering valley—rose hailing shouts, voices exultantly waking in response to the great, red excitement flaring its banners high, calling to the primitive in men's hearts . . clattering of farm-wagons . . men larruping and exhorting their horses . . some voices floating up absurdly clear. . .

"It's the Shieldses' old barns."

"Cricky!—lucky 'taint nothin' else!"

"Close your eyes, Jessie, and it'll seem like the clatter of the chariot races—back in a former incarnation of ours, when we were sweethearts . . don't you remember?"

. . . . . .

Safely waiting till the fire had dwindled to thin, pale edges, we sneaked homeward.

"I don't feel bored any more," confessed Jessie naïvely.

. . . . . .

Old Shields, the laconic Yankee, dropped his brevity of speech when Jessie and I eagerly trooped down for the milk, next morning. . .

We learned from him that it hadn't been tramps, but spontaneous combustion, and that he didn't mind, as the barns were so old and ramshackle he wanted them out of the way . . even the hay in them being of three years' standing . . he having no use for it, since he'd sold most of his cattle.

We were relieved that we'd caused no loss.

. . . . . .

I was assured in my heart that if we hadn't released the intensity of our emotions thus, another thing would have taken place. . .

But a new danger rose for Jessie's fidelity to her mate. . .

The conflagration which sublimated our pent-up emotions, had not only released our high-wrought tension, but it had introduced an easy friendliness that was in itself precarious. . .

I felt that all I needed do now, was to mope, be miserable, to wake renewed compassion for my celibate plight:

Then an incident took place that turned the final corner. . .

Since Jim's going our table manners had become less rough-and-ready . . there was no more reaching into common receptacles with individual forks, or licking and replacing spoons in jars of jam and applebutter:

Jessie had just delivered herself of a rollicking remark the substance of which I cannot recall. . .

We were eating fried eggs. . .

Feeling a domestic easiness before me, her mind, doubtless went back to Jim's table democracy. . . Joyously she lifted her plate, and began licking the yellow smear of the yolk from it, in ostentatious camaraderie, her tongue spatulating and showing a yellow-colored granulation. . .

We could never have been close to each other after that . . even if she had sought me. . .

. . . . . .

An apparition appeared in the form of Mrs. Barbara Vintoun, the Brooklyn woman who wrote me every time she saw a poem of mine in a magazine. . and with whom my vanity led me desultorily to correspond . . the woman with whom I infrequently drank coffee, with a shot of rum in it. . .

I would not have minded so much her appearing alone to see me; that would have shown me off well before Jessie. . .

But she had not come alone, but with a man, the grossest looking I've ever seen, every other inch of whose person was another vulgarity—dressed loud as a repeating alarm clock—flaunting a bluff, offensive familiarity . . naming me by my first name in an infinitely

insulting manner immediately on being introduced—worse, speaking of Jessie as "Jessie."

It was easy to understand that Barbara Vintoun had let him read my letters, especially the several I had written her from Hillwood.

I could understand, further, that if I had lied about her to Janice —and to Jessie, she had matched me lie for lie, by retailing the feminine falsehood that I, a notorious, mad poet, was unsuccessfully in love with her. . .

Jessie had directed her and the man with her, evidently, out to where I lay in the sun. . .

I overheard them making merry over me, as they approached, while yet I did not know who they were. . .

Quickly I slipped into my pants, but had not been given time to jerk on my shirt, before they were standing over me——

"Hello, Johnny! O, don't mind us."

"Mrs. Vintoun!" I could only exclaim, concealing my chagrin and confusion at their ostensible attitude toward me. . .

"Johnny, this is George Haws."

"Pleased ta meet ya, Johnny!" and a great paw was thrust at me, that, squeezing my hand with affected heartiness, nearly broke my fingers . . the pair the while smiling at each other their assurance of what a freak, an exhibit, I was! . . in reciprocal, stealthy glances. . .

She regarded him, fondly subservient.

"George and I were motoring through Connecticut, Johnny . . and I spoke of knowing you . . and he thought we ought to stop off. . ."

"Yes, I'm sure—you're—welcome," I forced myself to say. . .

She stepped apart with me, revealing the real situation of affairs with her and "George" . . I was more chagrined and humiliated than before. . .

"Say, Babbie, don't you think we'd better go back to the house and wait, while Johnny's——"

I indicated, controlling my resentment, that we could finish the entire visit while I was there. . .

Taken aback, they paused . . then Mrs. Vintoun observed:

"What a quaint little woman your Jessie is . . rather pretty, too."

"She's not my——" I choked with expressed resentment at their renewed familiarity. . .

I perceived that she was but following the man's cue.

"Johnny and Jim and Jessie," said Haws, and Mrs. Vintoun interpolated, "what delightful freedom from restraint they must have up here?" . . both of them speaking with desire to seem intimate with our lives, but sounding insinuating and insulting in their use of the third person. . .

"Excuse me, but I was writing—" I dismissed them.

They trod their way back to the house, saying they'd wait for me there. .

Bracing myself unhappily for further encounter with Mrs. Vintoun and her lover, I dressed, finally, and came back to the house . . to find no one but Jessie there, and to be greeted by her thus:

"I must say that you have mighty funny friends . . must confess they were too much for me, though I tried to be polite. . .

"When they gave indications of hanging around for the rest of the day, I practically invited them to clear out," Jessie was all fired up—"the dirty people . . he's a regular neck-tie salesman, and she —and she—Johnny, the best I can say is, I don't admire your taste . . if what you told Janice, and Janice proclaimed at that party—is true!"

I hung my head, confessing the untruth of it silently . . then I defended her slightly by saying:

"When you talk with her alone, she's all right . . but she's the kind of woman that plays chameleon to the last man she had!"

"I want to warn you—did you notice how wax-pale she was?" said Jessie, "do you know what's the matter with her?

"She takes heroin, or I'm the biggest liar in Connecticut. . .

"—Better watch out, my boy, forming such friendships."

I turned away, stunned with shame. . .

I confessed to Jessie that Mrs. Vintoun had gotten off with her friend Haws,—by telling her husband she, Jessie, was her friend, and that she was visiting her at Hillwood . . and that she had asked me to forward any letter that came for her, to a certain inn in the Berkshires.

"I'm of a mind to be mad at you . . putting me in the position of pandar," Jessie cried.

. . . . . .

One morning two letters were dropped in the R.F.D. box: a long-awaited one from Whellen, answering favorably my ballade-plea, and enclosing a ten dollar check, the first of ten weekly payments; the other letter was one from Jim, to Jessie . . in which Jim announced he was taking the train, next day, for Hillwood.

"You see by this how honorable a man Jim is—in spite of his other defects, such as most human beings have? You see how he never thought of sneaking in on us!" Jessie spoke proudly.

. . . . . .

The certainty of her man's return assured, Jessie insensibly and gradually shifted her attitude toward me into that of the impersonally friendly wife whose heart is utterly given over to her husband. . .

"Haven't we been the crazy pair, though?—guess we'd better not speak about the barns,—at least not right away—if at all!"

And, quite frankly, came the admission—"we *have* skirted dangerous territory, haven't we?"

"For a man and woman alone, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Suppose we had succumbed to—the danger? What of it? What would it have amounted to, as far as Jim is concerned?" I was rebellious against myself, knowing the ripeness of the opportunity had passed, to present itself no more . . I knew that the incompletion of our relationship would tantalizingly haunt my imagination for years; that often I'd think back regretfully to what might have happened, but had not.

Jessie must have been toying with the same idea, for she remarked:

"If—if anything had happened—what a fix we'd be in now!"

"Not unless you confessed——"

"You don't think I'd hide the truth," she flared, then after a pause, continuing—"besides, Jim's no fool; that outside slowness of his is not in the least mental. It implies no lack of quickness of perception . . he would have read it instantly in my—in your, eyes!

"Then there's no telling what might have taken place!"

"You don't think I'd have been afraid, do you?" I protested, somewhat gustily.

"I'm only glad neither of us will have to meet such a test!"

. . . . . .

Jessie raised her head quickly from the volume of Rossetti from which she had been reading aloud, from "The House of Life."

"Wonder what time it could be?"

We were expecting Jim home, and his train was due at two o'clock.

I started up, walked over to the metal alarm clock on the mantel back of a vase of flowers—not noticing that it had stopped, "O, there's still lots of time!"

We sat out on the edge of the porch, resuming our reading and discussion.

"I've never quite grasped the reason why Robert Buchanan castigated Rossetti in his 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' . ."

"You haven't," took up Jessie, "then listen to this sonnet, which is excluded from most of the editions of the "House of Life."

"She read me "Nuptial Sleep."

"Now I see . . and yet no one should have taken offense at such a beautiful poem; a poet like Robert Buchanan least of all."

"That was his one mistake, and he paid dearly for it . . the poets he attacked were all prominent, and I'm afraid, they rather combined against him."

"Keeping him from his full measure of fame?"

"Yes."

We both knew Robert Buchanan's poetry . . we spoke of his having been the forerunner of the Celtic School in his "Songs of Orm," of his having antedated Masefield in his modernity, in his "St. Ives," the Mormon poem. . .

Then, to our amazement, we heard a far whistle. . .

We jumped up simultaneously.

"There's the train."

"Nonsense, it must be a special running through."

Jessie hurried in to the clock again.

"Say, the clock's stopped—and it's been stopped God knows how long . . That was Jim's train . . now we're in for it!"

She lit a cigarette, trying to appear unruffled . . "well, it's all in the day's work."

A new thought came to her—"Come on; let's hurry, maybe that was a freight."

"No, it isn't a freight!" I answered listening expertly to the far, trailing sound; "I know the kind of a noise a freight makes . . that was his train, all right!"

. . . . . .

Jim stepped up the hill at a brisker pace than his usual saunter. Jessie stepped self-consciously toward him, meaning to fall into his embrace.

"Wait," he bade unexpectedly, though in his easy manner, "—just wait till I put this grip inside the house."

We waited for his emergence, expectant of we knew not what.

I tensed my muscles involuntarily; Jessie straightened, bracing herself.

I thought of that shotgun behind the door. I stepped quickly back of the table where we breakfasted on the porch. . .

At his first step out at the door, I would heave up that table between me and him, and rush against him with it—that is, if he emerged, holding the shotgun . . then it would be a fight for the gun . . I would knock him out with the butt of it, if I succeeded in getting it away from him . . all this action my absurd imagination portrayed. . .

Presently Jim appeared in the doorway. He had no gun. He stood there studying us smilingly, minutely, in a slow silence, looking with deep scrutiny into our eyes, his face slightly clouded—we smiled guiltlessly back, though coloring. . .

"Well?" drawled Jessie. . .

"Don't you call this a hell of a way to welcome your old man back from New York?—not meeting me at the train?——"

Then Jessie explained about the clock. . .

The cloud of dubiety cleared from Jim's face. We could see he was sure at last everything was all right. He relaxed, relieved . . and God knows we did too.

"I'll bet you talkative buggers have been having a grand old time, chewing the rag, while the old grouch has been away!"

One arm flung around Jessie, he drew the willing girl in to him affectionately, kissing her possessively and securely; she went limp

in his arms, from the excitement of the suspense, and from her connubial love for him.

He extended his disengaged hand toward me, in slack, unconsciously insolent amicability. I caught it in mine almost thankfully. . .

"Hope you've taken good care of this girl while I was away, Johnny?"

"Sure I have."

"Yes, Johnny's been a regular peach!" affirmed Jessie. . .

"Well, it's a surprise to me," Jim joshed both of us, "I didn't expect to have any woman when I got back!"

. . . . . .

"Old farmer Shields has been saying we've had quite a fire up here . . said his two barns burned down . . didn't you two see it?—funny you haven't told me a word about it."

We began to laugh, then Jessie confessed:

"Sex-sublimation," he hit the point though in jocularity—"I see it doesn't do for a fellow to run off and leave his woman alone with another man—even if nothing does come of it!" . . he, for his part, he went on to say, would never again try the experiment. . .

"And you'd better lay low, both of you—for there happens to be a law against arson, even if those barns were old and worthless."

. . . . . .

Clinging to him in a way that made me uncomfortable, sedulously fondling him before my irking sight from day to day, Jessie's relaxed monogamic femaleness began to get on my nerves. . .

Our literary discussions flagged . . ceased . . though I put a few half-hearted efforts into keeping them up. Often Jessie rose abruptly like a person trying to escape my presence. . .

Also, she took to speaking patronizingly of me in the third person, while I was present, girding continually at me and my ideas—till Jim himself for all his perspicacity, grew puzzled at her perverse behavior and rebuked her for it. . .

. . . . . .

On receiving the next remittance from Whellen, I bought a ticket for New York . . breaking off every literary project of mine . . a good excuse . . leaving the great, allegoric, revolutionary novel a

mere beginning fragment . . never having done any more than take a few notes on my Christ-Napoleon drama.

My summer spelt frustration—as how many summers and winters and springs before and since did not spell the same. . !

A few lyrics hastily dashed off as ever! Beyond that, nothing but boasting of what great things I would accomplish—in the future!

. . . . . .

It was hot in the City when I returned to Greenwich Village. But I did not dislike the heat; and the newspaperish odor of the subway smell as good to me, in my joy over my return—as the fields and rocky slopes around Hillwood.

I rented a furnished room in a new place; for Mrs. Nough had no place left for me. . .

I have kept no count of the furnished rooming houses I lived in, those few but event-crowded years. Suffice to say that I progressed from one of them to another, experiencing a weird succession of those individualists and eccentrics known as "landladies. . ."

Often, for non-payment of rent, I ventured home to discover my room-door padlocked against me . . not very many of my subsequent landladies possessed the sympathy and understanding and helpfulness of Mrs. Nough. . .

Having my mss. and books held for non-payment of rent, and being locked out from my lodgings, though it always sent me into momentary depression, eventuated in stimulating me to renewed lyric effort . . as selling a lyric was, ironically enough, the only medium I had for raising ready money with which to discharge my obligations. . .

And, in the meantime, I seldom failed to find a room in the apartment of a friend at my disposal for a few day's retreat . . and plenty of coffee and tea supplied, and occasional wine, to stimulate me to poetic composition. . .

Then it would be—grandiloquently—"Here's what I owe you, 'Mrs. Smith'," or, "Mrs. Jones," or whatever my landlady's name chanced to be . . though, after the Scriptures, her name should have been legion. . .

Paying up, then I am allowed my possessions, together with my battered typewriter, never fully paid for, that I operated resoundingly with my two next-to-index fingers. . .

Their confidence in me shaken:

"Sorry, Mr. Gregory, but you'll have to look for other lodgings—but if you'd find a regular job!——"

They didn't think it natural, poet or not,—to find a man in his room any hour during the day, when others were out, in offices, at work. . .

. . . . . .

The ground I was treading on was spiritually dangerous ground. The less I achieved the more I proceeded to live in the dream and in the outward verbal asseveration of what I was GOING to achieve: lyrics, narrative poems, short stories, sketches, epics, novels, plays, treatises (each one to take its place among the classics—I created whole libraries by talking) . . The less I wrote the more I boasted of what I was about to write.

I no longer traversed the country, a vagrant; I was, instead, the literary tramp of the furnished room. . .

. . . . . .

Janice was getting on to me:

"Poor, dear, Johnny's not only counting his chickens before they're hatched, but before he's got the hen to lay the eggs." That was Janice's comment that was brought back to me.

. . . . . .

During my roomless periods, Frank Grayson and Minnie Saxe proved to be my best friends. . .

"Maybe you'd best stay indefinitely at Graysaxe."

"No, Frank,—I'd only stagnate there . . but I'm sure my affairs will soon take a turn for the better."

"But, my boy,"—(calling me "boy" though he was but a few years older than I)—"you're burning out the very pith of your life in fevers of uncertainty—you're drifting about, rootless spiritually . . it's not conducive to literary effort . . soon you'll cease to be young—then what will you do?"

"O, I'll have written several famous books presently," I replied, in a dream. . .

"O, you poor big lamb!" Minnie showed tears of sympathy in her eyes—"what you need's a good, efficient woman to take you over."

"No, Minnie,—don't put that in his head," protested Frank

vigorously,—"I'd hate to witness Johnny growing like one or two chaps we know . . Widler, for instance. . ."

Widler I casually knew. He had lived, for three or four years, on the economic efforts of Nancy Rhoad . . and Widler was no further along since that night, at one of The Annual Anarchist Balls, when, overcome by hunger and drinks fed him on an empty stomach, he had confessed his impasse to Nancy, had slumped into her motherly care, and had been whisked away in a taxi to her apartment. . .

Widler was still talking and talking—this great, kind, but babyishly selfish man—of his projected Tabloid Biographies . . that he was ever on the point of writing, but never wrote!

"Widler, how are the Tabloid Biographies progressing?"

He hadn't started writing them yet, he'd admit, but he was taking notes on them in the Public Library—"they involve a great mass of data, you know!"

What Widler was really doing—for he was not wholly slumping,—was this: he had reversed the conventional positions of man and wife, and he kept Nancy Rhoad's three-room flat as neat as a new pin, delightedly doing all the marketing, cooking, and housework.

. . . . . .

In Patchin Place and in Milliken Place lived a few writers and artists who stood in my position of not being able to afford, unless invited, to spend their summers out of the City. They stayed on in New York, during the stifling months, scraping along, as in Fall and winter, on book-reviewing, or by holding their day-long or part-time jobs . . on occasion some of them served as "ghosts" to well-known or obscure society or near-society people, or to others in the public eye—film stars and the like, who itched to become known as writers. . .

Of this group of Bohemians Allan Masson and Randall O'Liam I had already become acquainted with . . each of whom lived in a tiny apartment in Patchin Place . . an area then unimproved. The buildings were fitted out with mere gas-flares for light and heat, and the flow of the gas was controlled by quarter meters . . there were chilly little fireplaces after the worst English Soho models . . sinks

with running taps . . no bath tubs . . and in the backyards stood the old-fashioned jakes prevalent in rural districts.

But the inhabitants of these comparatively sequestered, miniature Bohemias were cleanly and orderly of person, in spite of defective arrangements and primitive plumbing . . for bathing, tin tubs and wash tubs served, though the water had to be heated over gas burners. . .

I thought of Valery Malkan when I saw their chairs and tables and couches, all futuristically and cubistically decorated by their owners.

The main issue with the Patchinites and Millikenites was their own emotional life, and their direct, straightforward right to it.

They loved their books; they loved art, and everything that distinguishes the mind of a man and woman from the mind of a slave or a business man.

Hostages they had given to fortune, but the gifts of their giving were slight—and given with the tongue in the cheek.

Mohammed's maxim fitted them:

"Had I two loaves of bread—aye, aye,—
One would I sell, and hyacinths buy
With which to feed my soul!"

. . . . . .

Allan Masson had been to Russia, a fact of which he was pleasantly and boyishly proud. It was his present fad to play the æsthetically religious reactionary.

He revered the book "Holy Russia" by Stephen Grahame, whom he had met while abroad.

Masson affirmed that he was about to take a vow of celibacy, as lay member in a certain celibate brotherhood connected with the High Church of England . . the brotherhood's monastery being located somewhere on the left bank of the Hudson, up-State. . .

Masson was rather handsome, sensuously full-eyed. In spite of his talk about celibacy he reminded me of a sleek, young, sportive bull. . .

His rooms were furnished in an austere yet richly ecclesiastic mode.

Yet I liked him, in spite of his posing about in a drab, monkish robe. . .

Masson had many girls "on the string," as I soon learned, who came to see him, went out to dine with him—listening in adoration to his ascetic talk.

. . . . . .

A friend of Masson's occasionally peered in at his door before he softly entered with the air of one who bore a great secret which he must by no means let escape . . Llewellyn Sprat had been through Russia and Siberia in company with Allan. He was a young English newspaper man—all horn-rimmed spectacles and perpetual in his contesting for the superiority of English Journalism and its ethics over the American. . .

. . . . . .

At Randall O'Liam's I was welcome whenever I chose to drop in. . .

The O'Liams gave "Thursday Afternoons," when the tiny, square-bodied, big-voiced man's pretty, Japanesque wife poured tea for a few gathered friends. . .

A specimen afternoon:

O'Liam voyaged up and down, debating on literary subjects with boisterous, personal wrath——

After a long battle between me and himself, he led me aside . . his voice softening triumphantly, confidentially—"I'm reviewing a marvelous book of poetry, for the Sunday *Times*—but I'll have to handle it delicately and indirectly to 'slip one over on them'—consisting, as it does, of a century of sonnets on birth-control and its necessity as a civilized measure."

His Japanese-like wife, trundling her small steps close by, overheard:

"One or two lumps? with or without cream?" she asked, smiling quaintly and poising a lump of sugar in the silver tongs, over my cup. . .

The quiet, pretty, amused, little woman spoke in a voice delicately imitative of a like portentous privacy, making fun of her husband's lilliputian pomposity. . .

Sylvia Lorenson entered sweepingly, in complete regalia of extreme dress reform. She was too fat for the seeming portières she

wore—supposed to be the garb of the classic Greek times. As if in antithesis deliberately comic, from her ear-lobes swept long-depending jade ear-rings. She was facially made up like a bedizened Trojan doll. . .

Despite a personally unconventional and revolutionary life, as far as herself was concerned—Sylvia Lorenson was by way of winning a big reputation by insincerely upholding in her writings, as things excellent in themselves in contradistinction to the Radical world—the smug, unimaginative régime of the ordinary man and woman, whom Julius Flatman afterward unexpectedly pilloried to the world, in "Commercial Street."

Sylvia Lorenson constantly repeated all the dull and infamous slanders against the Radical and Bohemian set . . in which she herself moved. . .

What an easy-natured crowd we were. . .

Too readily we overlooked and forgave such assaults! . .

Not even taking the trouble to extrude such persons from our midst—to freeze them out, after the manner of the conventional world. . .

. . . . . .

It was a damned lie that there was any appreciable amount of shoddiness and insincerity in our group, though, as for the latter charge, we might be, on occasion, defiantly flamboyant. . .

We were quite poor . . but was it not the last vulgarity of the *kept* artist and hack writer, to attack us, because we dwelt in attics?

. . . . . .

Sylvia Lorenson, sitting by my side:

"You've read 'The Doll's House'—probably seen it?"

"I have both read,—and seen it with Alla Nazimova as Norah!"

"We have, innocuously, the plural of it, here!"—she, glancing about the small, two-roomed apartment where heads were bent instinctively, because of low ceilings . . observing carefully the gyrations of O'Liam and the dainty, collected mannerisms of Mrs. Betty O'Liam. . .

"I believe I'll make a story of them," she whispered.

Later on Sylvia Lorenson did make a story of the O'Liams. But this time, for a wonder, it was justly appreciative, and not dashed

off in a style that rose to an insincere, slangy screech defensive of "Home" and "Country."

. . . . . .

My own dear people, of whom I was but half-worthy . . they came straying back to their jobs in the City . . back from the lakes and mountains of New England, the pine woods, hills and shores of New Jersey.

Janice, too, and her small group, who had been on Curlew Island—they came roistering back, brown from much sun and open weather, but not looking a whit more rested than before they departed for their vacations. . .

"As if any one ever rested—Janice about!" proudly asserted Billy Saunders . . at Trotter's. . .

"Yes, it's been argument all night, and a plunge into the refrigerating Maine ocean, at dawn—alongside the seabirds!" put in Harry Parnell, as proudly.

"After which," took up Vera Williams, "we'd sneak off for a few hours' sleep, like culprits . . while Janice, as far as any of us could observe, plunged headlong into her day's writing and study."

"That woman's made of iron."

"You wait—flesh and blood can't stand such a pace . . she's headed for a big nervous breakdown, unless she learns to take it easier—or my name's not Junius Alverson!"

. . . . . .

Janice enjoyed, as I knew she would, my story of my summer at Hillwood.

"I was certain that much of what you've related, would happen,—but I also rather expected——"

"That I'd hit it off with Jessie, and take her away from Jim?"

"Yes, I was almost praying for that to happen——"

" 'Praying for that to happen,' " I interjected. . .

"Because you're the greater poet,—and Jessie ought to be supporting—while she's about it—the biggest genius at hand! . . you —if you'll only get down to work!"

. . . . . .

It was at a gathering at Janice's that Constance, the Jukes child, first appeared to my eyes:

Suddenly, from a bedroom, she shot, before Janice and the rest

of us—vaulting into the room, lifting on a single toe, poising an instant, then swinging into a dance, graceful as the long ribbon of gossamer that sped through the air behind her, floating back from upheld hands . . she prancing on her toes elastically, like a young animal—and entirely naked. . .

After executing her brief, original dance, courtesying, she disappeared back into the bedroom from which she had unexpectedly emerged. . .

"How lovely!"

"Wasn't it sweet!"

"Janice, did you teach her how to do that?"

Before Janice could answer, overhearing, the five-year-old, precocious child thrust her head out—"I made that dance up all by myself . . Janice had nothing to do with it!" Constance asserted, amid general applause.

. . . . . .

"The time's ripe, at last, for the World Revolution," it was Big Joe Oakman.

I had just met him. It was in the studio of a beautiful and wealthy woman who affected radicalism. . .

Rumor had it that Mrs. Darten centered her interest in "The Revolution" chiefly on this ungainly, huge, powerful-bodied leader of the I.W.W.'s who towered like a cyclops—a gentle cyclops, over us . . his one eye gleaming enthusiastically——

"Do you know," Lilla Matthewson whispered to me, "I think Big Joe's becoming rather flabby since he's been taken up by these half-baked, half-society Radicals, who, no matter how sincere they think themselves, are merely finding another fad in 'The Cause'!"

"Don't you worry," put in Jack, Lilla's husband, "Joe's using them as tools in The Bigger Game—gathering in their money to help the strike that's coming. . ."

Above this hive of whispering, the voice of Janice Godman rose, clear and fine, in query:

"Joe Oakman, will you answer me one question?"

"That all depends, my dear lady, on what the question is going to be," responded Oakman politically, a broad smile crossing his face lengthwise. . .

"Joe Oakman, did you, or did you not, kill Governor Middleburg, of Utah?"

"Madam, there are some questions that are asked in public and answered better in private!" Oakman shot back rebukingly, amid general applause. . .

"Sometimes Janice—damn her—can be rather silly!" observed Lilla, privately, to me. . .

. . . . . .

The I.W.W. throve in New York . . there they rented headquarters . . large, bare rooms full of books and papers and magazines donated by sympathizers. I wandered into the place—was dubiously looked upon, to my chagrin.

"An Intellectual, huh!"

"A writer, titty-sucker to the Upper Classes!"

"I'm a poet!"

"Pretty bad, unless you have guts, like Joe Carrol."

Joe Carrol, writer of the best I.W.W. songs, had been lined up and executed for murder, in a Western State, because he had refused to give a woman away, who might have afforded an alibi, they quaintly alleged. . .

Here was I, among a bunch of super-bums, who were showing me up, in the face of their stern experience, for the dilettante tramp I was. . .

I was ill-at-ease with them.

I tried to join their group—was refused a membership card.

. . . . . .

It was Big Joe Oakman himself who roughly pronounced—"You Intellectuals! . . The real workers have no use for you . . for you've always been the hangers-on of the Ruling Classes—and are so, still! . .

"You're never anything but intrigued by a new idea—that's all!

"We're right never to put faith or trust in you! . .

"But, till the Revolution's won——

"We'll use you, by God,—up to the hilt!"

It was at Lilla's, in the Ecclesiastic House, on Fifteenth Street, that Big Joe promulgated this pronouncement. .

"But Joe!" began to expostulate Harry Parnell——

Big Joe cut in—"Oh, sure! you help us a bit!

"But when it comes to a real show-down—" he blew on the extended palm of his wide hand as if blowing thistledown off to voyage along a summer breeze——

"That's the way you go! POUF! You're just not there!

"No, my friends—for I can't honestly call you 'fellow-workers,' in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat you will hold less place than among the Capitalists, who have always distrusted you—you men without a country—for we can't easily forget (and small reward you've got for it!) that through the ages you've mostly stood on the side of the Oppressors!" . .

. . . . . .

"Big Joe's just talking to hear himself talk!" . .

"—Don't you fool yourself!" . .

. . . . . .

Often I went to visit my good, new-found friend, Allan Masson . . to borrow a dollar or a couple of dollars . . always I came upon the play-boy stalking grandly about his small dwelling-place in his monk's garb. . .

He always afforded me money——

"I've just sold a book review," "I've just sold an article!" . .

And, one time, when I arrived at his place, to borrow, he was sorry that he could not invite me to dine with him at Paglieri's. . . ("Think I've just landed a fair job—editing!")—but he'd a date with a girl . . some day he'd introduce her to me . . (pride) . . she was a fine girl . . he thought a great deal of her . . she was HIS GIRL. . .

But Masson was an enthusiast of girls. . .

Each one, in turn, he was sure—was HIS girl! . .

. . . . . .

"Some day, when I'm a big editor, I promise to buy many of your poems" (incidentally, he has since kept his promise)—"for I think you have the goods, Gregory,—but you don't take on the right pose—chuck the right kind of bluff! . ."

" 'The right kind of bluff'?"——

"Oh, I know that, fundamentally, for all your B.S., you believe in yourself . . and rightly . . for I think you've got the goods, Gregory——

"—And you succeed in impressing editors by your line of talk——

"But, to get on, you're not taking the right lead. . .

"You ought to dress swell,—belong to a Club, SEEM to have plenty of the world's goods. . .

"That will impress the average editor more—as to rates he will pay—than your persuading him you are a genius! . .

"Why, I'll wager you, right now, that many a mediocre versifier that the editors privately acknowledge as such—receives more per line for his work, than you do—and all because you've allowed them to make a newspaper boast of you as the 'vagabond poet' who's always broke!"

While Allan Masson was assiduously prinking himself for his dates. . .

"In fact, I know, from the Inside, that your manner of existence, and the things you stand for, in the popular mind, hurt your career sadly . . why don't you try the other tack for a while?" . .

"Whellen's constantly pressing me with the same advice, but somehow I can't follow it! Sometimes I wish I could!"

. . . . . .

"I'm beginning to hate this locality," pronounced Allan Masson, carefully brushing his dinner coat—"and the shifts and pitiable subterfuges of the Bohemian Life. . .

"The artistic and literary poor give me the same discomfort that other sorts of poverty give me——"

. . . . . .

I wanted to get good and drunk. . .

Nothing else would satisfy me.

A good, big drunk would wash away the futility, the waste, the ineffectiveness, of my days!

Wine would cause me to believe, for awhile, that I had done what I should have done but had not,—would bring to my long, wearying dream, the tang of reality! . .

. . . . . .

There was a cellar on Macdougal Street. . there were rude, board tables about . . there was sawdust under them. . . It was an Italian spaghetti place where laborers, mostly Neapolitan, congregated, to sit, vociferous, over their red wine. . . There I went. The wine was cheap. I drank and drank. I wrote and wrote—some excellent stuff, but mostly balderdash! . .

But—hurrah! . . under the influence of the red wine I had finished the first act of my mammoth Christ-Napoleon drama! . .

. . . . . .

I remembered, mistily, shoving that hastily scribbled mms. into my pocket. . .

I remembered, that, earlier in the evening, I had been invited to a party Hall Mandreth was throwing——

Hall Mandreth, the young fellow who, during the day, worked as manager of a telegraph office,—whose one love was Grand Opera and classical music, which he played, far into the night, on his pianola, in rooms opposite Lilla Matthewson's place, on Fifteenth Street! . .

I thrust an extra bottle of wine into my hip pocket, and traced my steps toward the Ecclesiastic House on Fifteenth Street.

When I reached there the party had not yet begun:

"They must be dining out late, somewhere . . all of them!

"Anyhow, I'll get in, and wait!"

I swung up over the area, risking my neck in my condition. I burst the window lock and lurched into Mandreth's rooms, tumbling across a bed directly under the window, sliding to the floor and passing out. . .

"Here's Gregory, full as a tick."

"How did he get in?"

"—Burst the window open. . ."

"—Swung across the area . . took a chance, the condition he's in."

"Ugh! there's a draught—some one close the window."

I looked up into their faces, with a belated, twisted grin, disentangling myself from the couch-cover I'd pulled down after me.

The room soon reverberated with talking, argument, shouting, singing, over and above which crashed the strains of the pianola that Hall Mandreth was drunkenly playing.

I sprawled upward, reeled through the midst of the swirling hubbub, saved myself from falling by catching the corner of a table, flopped onto the bed, and lay there in a happy daze. . .

Junius Alverson flopped on the bed beside me. . .

"Move over, Gregory."

"All right."

"—Say, Gregory, do you know, I think I'm a wee bit drunk?"

"—A wee bit? Junius, you're twice as drunk as I am!"

"This is the first time I've been on a big toot, and I'd like to know what's wrong with it . . it's magnificent . . it makes me feel liberated, free! It's like flying . . I wish I could feel this way all the time!"—Junius.

"Hall Mandreth's rooms are decorated like a movie queen's," remarked Harry Parnell. . .

"He belongs, though!" I affirmed dreamily from where I lay. . .

People seemed to keep falling over and across us all night; threshing around, rising again . . but we didn't mind . . but kept on extolling the glories of wine, and discussing literature. . .

There were loud voices, cries, scuffling, near-fights that heads not clearer but more peaceable, frustrated. . .

And through and above all the uproar, Hall Mandreth, drunk as the rest, kept his pianola crashing and banging Wagner. . .

. . . . . .

I started awake precipitously, clear and fine in mind and body instead of feeling soggy and thick in both—because I had needed just that amount of wine-bibbing.

I stepped over several people lying on the floor, wrapped in rugs.

On the center table a random heap of half-dollars, quarters, dimes, caught my notice,—that some one had drunkenly heaped out, from his pocket there.

Unhesitatingly I scooped up the stray silver, and went forth to breakfast. . .

After breakfast I took the subway to the Grand Central.

"I must stop this dilly-dallying about," I thought, "and go on with my play on Napoleon."

I would cut clear for several weeks, taking advantage of Grayson's standing offer of Graysaxe . . the key would be under the steps that led up to the porch. . .

. . . . . .

I piled wood on a huge hearth fire.

I sat there a long time, thinking myself over——

"You're a big faker," I said to myself again,—"and it's more shameful than ordinarily, with you . . because you know well, that,

if you'll only get down to business, you have wonderful writing in you. It's high time you cut out the hokum and boasting."

After a while of self-castigation, I took out of my pocket the crumpled mss. of the first act of my play that I had hastily scribbled the night before, under the influence of wine——

And, almost as soon, threw it into the fire.

Its jumble of incoherent commonplaces sickened me. . .

"Wine might help a fellow to an occasional lyric burst, but it doesn't seem to go with longer work!" . .

I sat about in a daze all day, grieved and unhappy. . .

By nightfall a dumb panic took me because I was alone. I feared doubly being alone in the dark; not because I was afraid of the dark, but because I was afraid to face my true self, then.

I slid the key back where I had found it, and took the electric train back to Grand Central.

. . . . . .

The revolutionary agitation continued, gathering ever greater head and force.

The editors of *The Proletarian* were no mean factors, but added voice and weight to the movement.

Those days, at any of our gatherings, we were never without some famous Radical leader in our midst . . besides Big Joe Oakman, there were Pat Quinlan, Bill Haywood, Arturo Giovannitti, his mane of black hair and fine eyes and somewhat theatric Roycroft tie presenting, altogether, a handsome, poetic appearance . . and there were the fiery-worded Carlo Tresca, the child-like, but determined Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the jovial, rollicking, blue-eyed "Swede" Johannsen. . .

We liked to have these people about because they exhibited a surety of goal, a lack of quibbling over what the world needed to make it a better world (they had no doubt but that they KNEW)—an inextinguishable courage that contagiously bore us along with them.

In contrast to their exact, concrete program for the emancipation of the workers,—the philosophic schemes of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, and the Utopian dreams of the rest of us seemed misty and vague.

The fact that I at present think that they were wrong in seeking

to turn over the control of life to the stupidity of the incompetent masses, has nothing to do with them as glorious persons!

For they were folk of a high courage and a burning sincerity that at the time, burst through every barrier of reconsideration and cold logic.

. . . . . .

The City was full of "Wobblies," as the I.W.W.'s termed themselves . . rangy, shock-haired, wholesomely irreverent buckos who spoke scathingly of conditions, out of twisted, humorous mouths . . who were planning, among innumerable other things, a march on the Churches that stood idle except for one or two nights each week . . meaning to confiscate them as sleeping-places for homeless out-of-works.

One stunt of theirs we enjoyed immensely——

They would walk into restaurants, a group of them, order big meals of whatever they wished to eat; then they would march out, without paying——

And when the proprietor would try to stop them with, "Hey, who's paying the check?"

They'd answer back——

"—Charge it to John D."

. . . . . .

We sang the songs of the Wobblies with gusto . . though I scarcely think that Daddy Trotter enjoyed this new manifestation of ours . . but there was an unsmoothed vigor of rough balladry about the verses, a direct contact with life, as invigorating as strong drink—that took us captive. . .

"Halleluia, I'm a bum,
Halleluia, Amen,
Halleluia, give us a hand-out,
Revive us again!"

—then, in falsetto, imitative of a housewife answering the tramp, from her back door—

"O, why don't you work
As other men do?"

—and to the timid query, the ironic deep, roaring answer—

"How the hell can I work
When there's no work to do!"

. . . . . .

As they still do to-day, in their beginning, years back, the Salvation Army laid hold of popular tunes, turning them into hymns——

The Wobblies, with grim humor, turned the edge of these very hymns back against their adapters——

"*Long-haired preachers come out every night—*
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked 'bout something to eat
They will answer with voices so sweet:
You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die. . .

"*And the Starvation Army, they play,*
And they sing and they clap and they pray,
Till they get all your coin on the drum,
Then they tell you, when you're on the bum—
You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die."

. . . . . .

"You've yet to hear of one of the stunts—of the prime stunt—Janice pulled, while you were up at Hillwood last summer,—" and Billy Saunders unbosomed the tale to me:

Janice had come upon an old woman outcast on a bench in Washington Square, late, one night . . commiseratingly, she had brought her home with her, to afford her another chance in life.

"Janice turned the old girl over to us, before running back to Curlew Island, taking Constance along——"

First, Billy said, they had had to thrust the old vagrant into a

bath of hot water, and subject her to a thorough scrubbing at arm's length, "she was that filthy" . . "the old girl was still hopped up on cheap whiskey, dope, or something" . . "hardly realizing what was happening to her. . .

"When we had her stripped, and saw how filthy she was, we refused to go on with the job. . .

"But Janice rebuked us for not having more humility, alleging the instance of medieval queens and kings who washed the sores of lepers. . .

"*She*, herself, finished our long-distance scrubbing with a wash-cloth. . ."

"Janice certainly took a risk, if, as I suspect—" I interposed.

"Yep, the frightful old creature did have syphilis . . though Janice insisted it was in the stage that brought no contagion."

"What an experience . . though I'd hardly call Janice's performance a stunt . . it was, well, rather too decent for that!"

"We, the other girl, Viola, who was staying with us for a while, and myself—we put it up to Janice that we couldn't stay if she kept the old derelict. . .

"But Janice acted so heartsick over what she called our 'callousness,' that we had to give in. . .

" 'It's a real Christian test, after the manner of true Christianity —for all of us'—Janice maintained. . ."

"But didn't Janice subsequently—run off to Curlew Island?" I asked, tenting for Billy's reaction——

"Now look here, don't insinuate that she ran off to evade the situation—I tell you, she was finer and nobler than we were . . she left her new ward in our charge——"

"But where did the old woman finally disappear to?"

"Viola and I made up a purse of five dollars, and bribed her with it, to beat it, and never show up again. . .

"Which she did?" . .

"Yep,—strange, that you never heard of the case from Janice . . who thinks she just wandered off . . but"—hurriedly—"you must never tell Janice about the trick we played . . she would never forgive us."

. . . . . .

Allan Masson, after he grew to know me better, took on the

strange habit of Ally Merton and of the young hackwriters,—of taking me around to his various girls and showing me off to them, he, too, somehow considering that he thereby gained a sort of glory for himself . . having me "in captivity."

There was evidently a certain color and noise about me that created somewhat of a literary effect; no matter if I had, so far, achieved but little, though promising greatly.

. . . . . .

Masson's girls were of one type . . were mostly of the sequestered, demure cast,—the kind who longed for life but never got into it. . .

They were generally of impoverished but genteel families . . they dabbled a trifle in art, in poetry, in dramatics . . they affected tall candles burning in heavily curtained rooms while day, unheeded, went on without . . they received their friends in large, high-ceiled rooms of old houses where massed unused chandeliers still hung in hundreds of glittering crystals. . .

I grew fond of one of these girls that Masson affected . . the most quaint and withdrawn of them all.

Mera Harmer seemed translucent as she progressed here and there over the floor of her dim, taper-lit library.

The draperies she wore in a filmy, silken mass gave her the semblance of a spirit materializing. Yet she was far from the dress-reform mode of the Radical woman. . .

Through the overpowering influence of her father, a severe old fellow who edited a semi-society magazine of some prominence, she had developed into a throw-back of that old-fashioned Bohemia which evidently still existed in some secluded sections of the city . . the Bohemia whose extreme flouting and violation of the conventions consisted in a careful glass or two of such wine as invalids and valetudinarians sip sparingly for their health's sake . . under the influence of which, decorous laughter and raillery were indulged in, and colored balloons were tossed into the air and buffeted about from table to table, ascending and descending, the paper caps of the people settling awry from their amiable exertions.

Old man Harmer's crowd looked yet upon villanelles, rondeaux, and triolets as the literary fashion. . .

They quoted Omar Khayyam, interpreting the Persian poet's

sensuality in terms of the Sufi philosophy, where wine was supposed to mean the wine of the spirit, and the-girl-beneath-the-bough, the love of the soul for God. . .

At the most desperate moments, they quoted approvingly Henley's *Invictus*. . .

Lang, Austin Dobson, and Edmund Gosse were their great men.

. . . . . .

Mera Harmer's quaint, old-fashioned and prim Bohemianism interested me so much that, during my first visit to her with Masson, I had waited the opportunity to ask her privately if I might not come, some afternoon, and have tea with her alone, continuing our acquaintanceship. . .

Masson had stepped out to do some telephoning, unwilling to use the phone in the hall. . . "—a business appointment of a private nature he had forgotten about," he had alleged. . .

"—Business," laughed the girl, after he had gone,—"yes, with three other girls." And there was a tinkle in her voice like the stirred crystals of the chandelier hanging high above. . .

. . . . . .

"Mera, I'd like to meet your father, some afternoon. He must be quite an interesting man . . knowing all the English writers of the Eighties . . having known Tennyson. . ."

I was also considering that if I met the old fellow and was nice to him, not crossing him and listening to his literary fulminations against the moderns,—I might possibly sell him some verse. . .

But I learned from Mera, that if old Harmer knew she saw me, he'd "kick me out of the house," and send her packing to a maiden aunt of hers up in Boston . . an old lady who had written a book, once, and disapproved of everything that had taken place since she was a girl.

" 'Kick me out of the house'?" I rose to that irritably. . .

"Only metaphorically, of course," replied the girl, assuagingly.

. . . . . .

My most crowded year of erotic adventure. Women, who had not hitherto noticed me much, now seemed to come my way. But each flitting experience, instead of bringing me any deep satisfaction, sent me further a-field, seeking for the dream I was victim of; I continually was possessed of the obsession that some day, somehow, I

would come across the golden-headed, beautiful girl who would prove to be my true and ultimate mate. . .

. . . . . .

In the period of which I'm writing here, I presented a wild appearance. There was a distracted, burning look in my eyes that made me start back from my own appearance when I chanced upon it in a mirror, unawares.

Those days, I never passed a good-looking woman on the street but I turned to look at her, appraising her, even when there walked by my side another with whom I was having an affair.

Janice, detecting this street-habit of mine, made the observation, in her frank way, that I was becoming "as shameless as a monkey in a cage. . ."

Always on the quest—numerous erotic adventures and misadventures came to me . . most of them not outlasting three revolutions of the hour-hand of the clock.

There are names of girls and women that I have forgotten, while, curiously enough, remembering slight mannerisms of theirs that can never be forgotten.

I will present several of those experiences, and then proceed——

There was the dark girl from New Orleans:

I came upon her, in The Radical Club . . sitting alone . . of a winter evening . . sitting before the fire . . a stranger to me. . .

I had dropped in, restless, hungry for conversation with whomever I chanced to meet. . .

Aware of my immediate, greedy eye, she carefully presented her face in profile. It was prettier so than in full view. She pretended to be engrossed in a book, which she nevertheless held so my view of her face would not be obstructed.

The drums of my pulse beat faster from the excitement of an attractive, strange woman, whose acquaintance I knew I was soon to make. . .

It developed into a game of who should speak first. Fortunately there was no one else in the Club rooms . . finally she spoke—lifting her face from seeming absorption in her book, as if in surprise——

"—Beg your pardon, but have you the time?"

I had not. But, walking out and returning, I found out for her.

The conversation that followed between us was a forced one . . the girl seemed vexed, distraught . . always turning her face toward the door that led in from the street. . .

"Are you waiting for some one?"

"For a friend who seems to have gotten his dates mixed up."

"A dinner engagement?"

She nodded affirmatively. . .

"Why not come to 'Dava's,' and eat with me?"

. . . . . .

Dava Juston ran the Village Restaurant that we called—after her first name—"Dava's". . .

Dava had tried writing short stories of the Radical type for *The Little Review* . . and she had composed Free Verse crammed with metaphors chiefly of color till words had become, for her, a shifting of kaleidoscopes, not mediums of coherent expression of human thought and feeling. . .

But, in the creation of her unique little restaurant she had achieved art, had hit upon her right form of expression.

Her food was inexpensive and of extraordinary excellence.

Her customers ate at tables of clean, plain board,—sat on plain board benches.

Pale and aloof, she poised behind her desk, on a high stool,—or moved about in impersonal friendliness among her diners. . .

She judiciously and sympathetically trusted the artist and writer —the true Villagers—but brought them to firm accounting, when, rarely, one of them tried to put something over on her. . .

"Dava's" became more than a restaurant . . it became a salon of which she was the guiding spirit, an informal club the dues of which were payment for good food. . .

Soon everybody in the Village who sought a friendly gathering-place flocked there for meals. . .

And soon, as one must ever expect, the sensational Papers followed, and their stories brought the sight-seeing riff-raff.

But here Dava's icicle friendliness came in.

Before the frigid atmosphere she created for outsiders who gave the least evidence of overstepping the subtlest line, the boldest side-show-gaper among them shrank back, timid and careful of conduct. . .

I never could quite figure out how Dava did it . . but, a motion of the shoulder, a shading of voice, a certain look—and Dava had put Intrusion in its meek and conquered place. . .

"Dava rules by the intonation of an eyebrow," one of the gang once wittily expressed it. . .

In its most crowded condition, there were always several tables where "the bunch" might sit as long as they cared without being intruded upon by seekers after atmosphere. . .

. . . . . .

And "Mick, the waiter." There was Mick, the one waiter, who flew about, thridding the crowded room thick with people, voices, and a fog of cigarette smoke . . flew about, or casually loitered, according to his whim . . God knows how, but waiting on everybody —finally!

Dava herself was not more aloof and independent than he . . nor secretly in spite of professions to the contrary, any more liked and respected for behavior that portrayed indifference.

Dava stood in awe of Mick . . or affected whimsically to stand in awe of him.

Mick was not an Irishman, but a short, stub-nosed Pole, who had drifted in to answer for the job of dishwasher . . from which he had soon been promoted, at a pinch, to the position of sole waiter. . .

When the pressure of business became excessive through "too much popularity" (Dava's phrasing of it)—Dava had several times attempted to keep another waiter to assist Mick. But the latter was not to be placated by the title of Head Waiter that his employer had bestowed upon him; nor by the badge of office by means of which she had tried to bribe him. Under his adroit persecution, each new assistant soon handed in his apron and quit, and Mick was left to lord it alone . . though retaining proudly his title of Head Waiter and his badge. . .

When any one kicked about the slowness of the service, Dava stood by Mick, and those who objected were informed that they'd probably got into the wrong place, but that they could easily rectify their mistake by repairing to any of the numerous restaurants and quick-lunch counters just around the corner, on Sixth Avenue.

But the service was not too slow for us who lingered for exchange of ideas and human contacts, at "Dava's," till far into the night, and often all each long winter afternoon . . gladly letting our worldly duties and work go hang.

. . . . . .

My new acquaintance—she coquettishly refused to tell me her name—was thrilled with Dava's and the group. It was the first time she had been there. But we did not sit with my crowd, but apart.

"You don't live in New York, then?"

"No . . I'm from another part of the country. That's why there's no use in my telling you my name. I'm a private body whose name will never mean anything to people and you'll never see me again."

"Well," I replied, "if you don't tell me your name I won't tell you mine."

"Don't be pettish . . you needn't, for I know who you are already."

I was flattered, conjecturing that she knew me by fame, by my appearance.

She read my thought in my face, and proceeded to puncture my high-blown conceit, with—"I heard some one call 'Hello, Gregory.' "

Finally I succeeded in getting out of her where she was from . . New Orleans, and she was up in New York for a brief holiday . . she was a friend of Nancy Rhoad over in Milliken place and was visiting her for a few weeks . . "but if I keep on I'll be telling you my name."

"Nancy Rhoad will tell me that," I laughed.

"Oh, you know her?"

"Of course."

"Then . . I'll see to it she gives you absolutely no information about me."

"If you're determined to be so snobbish, what the devil did you come to dine with me for?"

"I wanted to see what Dava Juston's was like . . what the gang was like . . before I went home. . . Somehow, in my whirling about the town, I've neglected the Village." . . "The real gang's not here to-night," I lied. I didn't care to introduce her to any of them—

to any of the men especially,—and have her taken away from me . . for, though insisting on remaining anonymous, she was already holding my hand under the table ledge.

. . . . . .

"Where shall we go now?" she asked me.

"I can't take you to my place,—it's only a hall-bedroom," I replied boldly.

We were standing outside in the hall. Nobody else was there, either coming in or going out—for the moment.

She had given me such a deliciously intimate smile, that before answering her question I had drawn her to me and kissed her, and she ardently kissed back.

I learned from her that we might go to Nancy Rhoad's apartment for a while . . Nancy and Widler being uptown at a Labor rally to which she had not cared to go. . .

"But we can only stay there a few hours . . they might be back sooner than we expect. . . " she explained blandly.

It was half past ten only, when I found myself practically thrust out of Nancy Rhoad's apartment—the taste of a passionate good-by kiss on my lips rendering me distraught . . making me wish to stay longer . . but she would not agree to that.

"Dress, and come on out with me, then . . if you're so afraid Nancy and Widler might come on us."

"No, I'm tired . . I want to sleep now."

"I ask one thing then—tell me who you are?" I pleaded. . .

"Why can't you be content with—what you've had?"

Suddenly I flamed into a very rage of frustration . . hating her.

"You damned little snob—you think you're too good, I——"

I started back in. She slammed and locked the door in my face.

I walked and walked along the streets. That I had had her completely meant nothing now . . that I had been treated like a fool, meant all. . .

"The dirty little snob!" I exclaimed to myself. . . "Why, she's mad . . she's pathological . . that's what she is! . .

"I'm a fool . . to take a chance with such a woman!"

Never in my life had I felt more abandoned, more alone in an alien world; suddenly the observation came to me that this is what a woman must feel who is tricked by a man. . .

I was so ashamed of my treatment, my defeat, that I never spoke to Nancy Rhoad nor to any one else, about the girl I shall call "Doña Juanna. . ."

. . . . . .

It was an evening of mists melting into a steady, grey, marrow-chilling drip falling from everywhere. . .

Dispirited and aching for a woman's companionship more than ever, because of my experience with "Doña Juanna," I strayed again over to The Radical Club. . .

If I could find no one who would be companionable, at least there would be a glowing fire in the grate the pervasive warmth of which would restore me somewhat . . and, after that, I could sit over a couple of bottles of wine in that Italian wine-cellar down Macdougal Street but a few blocks . . sit and drink, and maybe a small poem would come that Munsey's or Manton's would buy. . .

And I could weave fancies of the day when I would be great and famous and had found my beautiful, red-haired mate that every man would be envying me for, seeing me with her.

. . . . . .

In the identical position before the fire "Doña Juanna" had occupied, sat Alla Robinson.

I had known Alla Robinson long before; had accepted her in her position of one of the inconspicuous, most subordinated members of our Club; had long observed her, moving about outside my life,—sometimes with Grayson, sometimes with quiet, spare-bodied Mack Dannen, Grayson's best man friend and his right-hand man in the management of the Club's affairs . . for Grayson and Dannen practically ran The Radical Club, holding firm control over all its activities.

Never before, as I said, had I given Alla Robinson enough notice to "place" her . . but to-night, in my forlorn mood, she attracted me . . as any other personable woman would have done.

I observed her sitting there before the fire, like a wood pigeon bunched, forlorn and unmated, on a bough alone.

I noted, alert, that, though her face was plain, it held one fine point,—great, velvety, unhappy eyes. The dark, faintly discernible smudge of down on her upper lip had not yet grown too prominent, as it would, later on in her life. Nor, as we spoke, did the

soft monotonous coo in her voice repel me. Instead, it attracted. Its monotony lulled, in harmony with the slow heat from the live, red fire before us. . .

"Were you waiting for some one, Alla?"

"Not exactly—though I was hoping that some one—I liked—might drop in."

"Well, here *I* am," I responded, trying to be sprightly. "How about *me?*"

I took her hand tentatively. She moved away from me, slightly embarrassed.

"Why, we're hardly acquainted."

"Then here's the time and chance for us to grow better acquainted."

"I never knew you felt any attraction toward me."

"I always did . . only I thought you belonged to some one else."

"That's a lie, you know that wouldn't have stopped you."

"How do you know it wouldn't have?"

I glanced cautiously about to see if any one else were coming in. Then boldly I put my arm about her, kissing her on the cheek.

Her head went back, she gave me her mouth, her arms coiled slowly up over my shoulders. . .

After a space . . she jerked back swiftly and I thought she heard some one coming . . but no one was . . she sat pensive, thrusting me off.

"What's the matter?"

"Perhaps I shouldn't have let you kiss me so soon . . they say the woman is a fool who does."

"Are you going to put a time-limit on love?"

" 'Love?' " I saw it was the wrong word to have said; she didn't like the use of the word. . .

"Need—human need, then," I amended, "the need of a man for a woman"—I looked, boldly and intently into her swimming, lustrous eyes— "the need of a woman for a man!" . .

I caught her close, kneeling beside her . . she returned me frightened, sad, insatiable kisses. . .

"But you mustn't be so impatient."

"I can't wait."

"Besides, it's not safe here . . we might be interrupted. . .

"Look out, your coat's smoking!"

I was kneeling in front of her, my back to the fire. And now I felt the heat unpleasant; and I smelt my coat scorching. . .

. . . . . .

Turning the corner into Fourth Street, I saw Frank Grayson approaching diagonally across Washington Square.

I huddled close against Alla, pushing her quickly onward. To be unrecognized, I slapped my cap on my head.

I was glad that I had prevented her from seeing Grayson and Grayson from seeing and recognizing us.

I didn't care, in my eagerness, to be stopped and talked to, by any one.

. . . . . .

As she let us in with her key, her apartment seemed familiar. But my passionate preoccupation in her prevented me from perceiving, then, where we were. . .

She lifted her pathetically weak chin, her eyes swimming with moisture.

. . . . . .

"Frank! Oh, my dear! . . Frank!" she cried out passionately. . .

"Frank?" looking at her closed eyes— "Frank—Who? . . I'm not Frank—I'm Johnny!" . .

She sank back, weeping convulsively. . .

Shaking her in my chagrin— "Tell me—Frank— Who?" I insisted. . .

"Let me alone! . . — Frank Grayson!"

"Why—damn it—Alla— Don't you know Frank Grayson's one of my dearest and truest friends . . what have you done this for?"

She rose, walking away from me . . she stood looking out at the window, unanswering.

"Why," a suspicion coming to me with form, "you must have seen him, by God, I believe you did see him—coming across the Park."

"All right . . I did!"

Turning squarely on me—

Looking around—appreciating where I was for the first time—

"Why—Alla—this is his apartment."

I saw in a flash that she had been his girl . . that she'd probably had a brief affair with him . . that she had kept his key, had hoped he would come in on us—her revenge for being dropped. I saw all this without her telling me. . .

Minnie Saxe was away for a few weeks, in Chicago . . rumor had it that this was one of Minnie and Frank's amatory off-periods for each other. . .

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere, to get out of here!"

"Wait and I'll go with you," she calmly bade . . "Renganeschi's is just around the corner . . let's go and have something to eat."

She seemed no longer weakish, but rather grim. It dumfounded me so, that I waited while she made her toilet, singing low to herself.

. . . . . .

It was true, though many of us lived up to the tests that sex-radicalism put us to,—many others failed, either wholly or in part . . little jealousies cropped up, small meannesses that we thought each other never capable of. . .

Proof not of insincerity, but of human weakness plus the power of the tremendous pressure of the conventional world of morals hedging us about.

Emma Silverman herself once intercepted a bouquet of flowers being sent up to her lover, Jack Leitman, by an attractive young girl —his admirer. . .

Tempestuously she dashed the bouquet on the floor of the hotel-lobby where she and Leitman were putting up (they were off on a lecture tour). . .

"I don't mind Jack's having affairs . . but I want him to choose some one who's more worthy of him . . not a brainless child."

. . . . . .

"Oh, Mr. Gregory," the girl called down to me over the railing . . "Lilla left word with me to tell you, when you came, that she had to run over to her hut in Jersey because her husband's been taken suddenly sick out there."

"Thanks for the message—but who are you?"

"If you hadn't been so drunk, the other night, at Hall Mandreth's party, you'd recognize me."

"I don't get that way very often," I replied, embarrassed.

"I should hope you didn't."

"But didn't Lilla leave a note for me? We were to have had a meeting of the editorial board of the *Proletarian* in her place today . . and now they've evidently gone to some one else's place."

I was soon upstairs, standing by the girl's side . . she couldn't help but ask me into her studio.

Introducing herself to me, she invited me to stay for tea. Her name was Gemma Donne. She was already a well-known artist and caricaturist of common American types. Her drawings were acute studies in character. She was a scholar of the shapes of noses, of the crudity and vulgarity of the mouths of the masses. . .

"You must excuse the topsy-turviness of my place," she begged, as she stepped over a litter of rubbish on the floor, to a gas burner, picking up, on the way, from a broken chair, a bronze tea kettle, filling it, and placing it over the fire. . .

She was beautiful. Her skin was nothing short of exquisite in its texture, in its whiteness. She had offered me a hand of exquisite white, though the long fingers were purple with dirt under the nails. . .

"Let us consider ourselves formally introduced," she had said.

"I never stand on formality," I declared.

"I do, quite often," she rebuked. . .

. . . . . .

"Make yourself comfortable till the water boils . . excuse me if I go on with my work for a while; I have a rush order."

She returned to her easel in the center of the large, bare, rubbish-littered room.

On a cord stretched across a far corner of the room hung some lingerie she had washed, and two shirtwaists . . evidently the sole intimate clothes she possessed . . for beneath the artist's smock she had on, when she stooped, gleamed the perfect white rondure of else-uncovered breasts. Her smock was splotched and streaked with all colors of dry paint. . .

I sat back in the midst of a feminine chaos, on the couch, pushing aside a work-basket with sewing material and ribbons in it, and a heap of loose-leaved etchings and prints that had slipped sidelong from three or four disarranged, untied portfolios. . .

Slouching back against the wall, I gathered up a handful of the

prints that had been lying on the floor . . mostly copies of Rowlandson from "The Travels of Dr. Syntax" . . running my fingers through my hair till it stood straight in all directions—my wont when abstractedly interested. . .

"Hey, Mephisto,—don't budge . . stay just as you are!"

She had been observing and earnestly sketching me, while I sat unaware . . impartially setting down my generous nose and mouth that strayed crudely to one side.

Meantime, the water had all boiled away, and she had to snatch the kettle off, and fill it again.

. . . . . .

Coming to Lilla's oftener than before, and at times I knew she would not be in, I needed to climb just one flight to Gemma Donne's studio that comprised lodging and workroom in one . . and Gemma Donne became my gently ironic, but sympathetic friend. She lent me quarters when I had none, and I returned the compliment, excepting that she had more quarters than I.

It was a hardship not to let my eyes continually rove over the lovely whiteness of her neck and arms, and the delicate regularity of her face. But her paint-dirtied finger nails served as an offset to her otherwise complete attractiveness.

When she detected the straying of my avid glance along her neck and bosom, instinctively defensive, she caught up her smock to her throat. . . I was more careful not to let her see me watch her fingers . . once or twice she caught my eyes upon them—

"It's hard," she explained, confused, "to keep one's nails clean, painting."

. . . . . .

Other girls . . who gave themselves . . I soon chose not to take them to Dava's. Ever in the company of a new girl, I did not care to have Dava fixate me with her steely, impersonal, deep-reading eyes . . and I did not like the gang to notice me, and find food for gossip . . and when I had along a girl at all pretty, my men friends were sure to linger about till they forced the introduction they sought.

. . . . . .

Christmas brought steaming, fat mists. It did not come cold and

brisk, as a proper Christmas should have done, with many bells ringing out clear in frosty air. . .

During the Holidays, it was good to have one well-to-do Radical friend like Danforth.

For I had, on invitation, gone out to Danforth's Long Island house for the Holidays. . .

Danforth and Julia, his wife, were setting out for Chicago, to spend the same period with his family; they were leaving the house under Mary Wyndham's charge . . Danforth's wife's sister. . .

Danforth's secretary, big Hugh Gaige, Alice Juvenal, a girl friend of Mary's, Mary, and myself—together we made up the holiday party. . .

Two Finnish servants,—a maid and a woman cook, comprised the rest of our household.

Danforth was taking the nursemaids and his children along.

. . . . . .

Leaving, Danforth enjoined us—

"Whatever you people do, look out for my Finns!

"Julia and I like Finnish help; they can scrub your floor, bring you a cup of coffee in the morning, wait on you at table—with an independent sturdiness that causes me, and especially Julia, to forget that fellow human beings are performing menial offices for us. . .

"But—temperamental! . . the Finnish servant will lay down her apron and be off without a word of complaint or explanation, if she makes up her mind she's been given offense; yet it must be a real offense, even if you *aren't* exactly cognizant of what it is. . .

"Workers—they do their jobs to perfection, putting their whole heart in them. . ."

. . . . . .

It had not been by chance that the Danforths had hit upon Finns for help . . part of that fine interchange of international Radical thought and forgathering,—Ona Malmquist, one of Finland's foremost women parliamentarians, had come to stay a while at the Danforths' while on a lecture tour of America. . .

And she had noticed, smiling fondly at the humanitarian helplessness of Julia Danforth—she had noticed how Julia Danforth treated her servants as equals and confidants, till it would be she, and not one of the maids, the cook, or nurse, who would be running to snatch

something burning off the stove, or to answer the door, or tend to a child that had set up a cry from some part of the house or grounds . . all of which worked to the detriment of a novel that, for that reason, she had for years been unable to get written.

Danforth was often grim about Julia's failure to keep her servants toeing the mark—grim as any common-sense, fair-acting man should be who paid people well to tend to a certain job—cooking or housekeeping as the case might be,—as he tended to his job of writing!

When he found his servants developing Grand Opera temperament over the frying of an egg or the proper tendance of a baby, he'd exclaim—

"I don't see how it's against the brotherhood of man when you expect people to do the job they're more than well paid for!

"Damn it, Julia, you're too lenient! . . And all we get is disorganization!"

Julia, answering, almost in tears—

"But, Hartley, darling, how else can I behave—with fellow beings?

"If they haven't the courtesy not to impose on me—is that my fault?

"I can't help the way they were brought up. . ."

. . . . . .

At this critical period it was Ona Malmquist who suggested a Finnish maid and cook to solve the problem of the help's taking advantage of Julia's sense of camaraderie and sense of Utopian decency. . .

One nursemaid for the children Julia was iron against changing . . the affable colored girl who continued to fulfill that office . . a girl who shirked continually fully half of what she was hired to do, yet who cried for genuine love of her mistress, if threatened with discharge. . .

When Danforth, ever so often, discharged her himself, she would refuse to go. . .

"Julia—show some backbone . . Carrie's impossible . . *you* fire her—she won't pay the least heed to me." . .

"I certainly will, this time." . .

But, shortly, Julia would be back—

"Have you fired her?" Danforth would ask, sternly.

"Yes . . but I had to hire her all over again"—tears bathing her cheeks—"the poor girl acted so miserable."

. . . . . .

Great-minded, great-bodied, talking-and-talking Ona. She was like a strong wind blowing in from a sea that beat sheer up over cliffs and rocks, and she partook of the qualities as well as of the sturdy complexion of those who sailed the sea. . .

Of the same body and texture, though stolider and less expressive, were the maid and cook who were her compatriots.

. . . . . .

"Ah, my friend Johnny, my dear poet—you must visit our Finland sometime . . you'll love our Finns—our primitive people . . and their ballads and their myths . . especially their great national epic, The Kalevala, that lives on, fresh, like this morning's sun, still, in their hearts.

"—Suppose you could go and stay among the old Greeks, turning time back, when the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' yet lived in their hearts and on their tongues?

"Going to Finland would bring the same wonder to you, a poet."

And Ona Malmquist sat, recitatively rocking her body, a ship at unquiet anchor amid waves of verse,—pronouncing and intoning the Kalevala to me, first in wild, sonorous Finnish, then in immediate English paraphrase. . .

. . . . . .

Before the Danforths left for the West, unfortunately Ona left too, to fill her lecture engagements.

Danforth had also enjoined us, before leaving—that he didn't mind what we did, as long as we left a few bottles of wine in the cellar, didn't burn the house down,—above all, didn't drive his help away. . .

Then off he and his wife went down the path to their car, each with an armful of baby, the colored maid with two armfuls. . .

Carrie, the temperamental nurse, loaded under the two larger children, rocked with a burden of secret laughter the cause of which she shared with no one. . .

. . . . . .

While both cook and maid were scrupulous in attendance upon us, we turned ourselves loose in enjoyment. . .

We lingered long, but not too long, over morning coffee, then each went to his or her room and wrote . . Mary Wyndham, on her life of Lincoln that she was preparing for a London publisher; Hugh Gaige, busying himself with gathering data for a vast, projected work,—a sociological history of the world's literature; Alice Juvenal revising the mss. of her recent volume of verse,—a brave rendition of Sappho, in which she glossed over none of the latter's love for her own sex. . .

Myself—characteristically, while attempting to work, I scattered my attention about, dreaming amid heaps of books that I had brought, like a literary jackdaw, to my room . . occasionally there came to me brief lyric snatches that I scribbled down.

. . . . . .

Afternoons we devoted to discussions of books, and, in fact, of everything under the sun . . debates resulted between me and Gaige especially which would have led a casual onlooker to believe that here were two men whose fierce argumentation must inevitably eventuate in physical combat. . .

At times Gaige and I did stand up, fronting each other, pounding each other on the chests, shouting at each other and letting off our superfluous physical energy. . .

To Alice Juvenal, who at first looked on with consternation, Mary would say, habitually leaning forward, twenty smiles shining at once over her face—

"Don't be apprehensive: they're only two little boys showing off!"

. . . . . .

"Sh! don't talk so in front of the maid," Mary warned us; we were at lunch; "she might resent it . . and the cook, in the kitchen . . your voices are loud enough for her to hear, too."

"Let them hear! what's the difference?"

"I suspect that they understand English better than they make out."

"What we say will be a sort of language-test, then."

"They're both pious Lutherans, Ona says."

"And are we to regulate our expression of what we think according to the ignorance of servants?"

"They have feelings—"

"Good . . let them have them."

So in spite of Mary Wyndham's protests and warnings we proceeded with our discussion as to what and who Christ really was . . Gaige maintaining that he was a hypochondriac, an extreme neurotic,—

I declaiming furiously at the top of my voice that he was a fine specimen of manhood, a super-tramp, a divine hobo going everywhere, interested in everything, broaching posing questions, drinking at inns, consorting with the outcast and under-world denizens of the day. . .

The maid, with a frightened look in her face, leaned over Mary where she sat, and murmured a word in her ear. Mary rose, hurried into the kitchen, hurried back into the dining room again—

"Gaige, Gregory, you must stop this . . the maid and the cook swear you're talking loud because you're angry at them . . not liking their service or cooking—or something . . I can't quite make out just what. . .

"But you *must* moderate your voices . . I came on the cook muttering and clutching a cleaver——"

"Tell the fools to mind their own business . . that we're merely discussing religion." Turning to Gaige, I continued——

"I think it's scandalous, Hugh, for you to maintain that Christ was an epileptic—"

"I didn't . . I was just quoting a French literary-medical authority—"

"How about your calling him a tramp, Gregory!" Alice Juvenal cried, rising with a snort of indignation from the table. . .

"I 'called him' nothing of the sort . . that is, I meant to cast no slur . . what of his statement about the fowls of the air and the foxes of the fields having nests and holes, but the Son of Man having nowhere to rest his head?

"Anyhow, you have no kick coming! didn't you say Sappho was homosexual?

"You offended me by that statement . . for Sappho is just as holy to me as Christ."

"Well, go on boys, go on—I suppose I am a bit old-fashioned!" Alice Juvenal exclaimed satirically, resuming her chair.

It was Christmas day.

"Anyhow, let's forget about Christ,—we don't need him any more. We have Havelock Ellis now," I asserted.

"I suppose, Alice, you don't mind our eating and drinking a great deal, to celebrate this day?—all the bourgeoisie do it, you know!"

> "—*While, falsely grateful man, at the full feast,*
> *To do God honor makes himself a beast!*"

Alice quoted savagely. . .

. . . . . .

We started early with the wine. . .

"Woe unto the people whose princes drink wine in the morning," I quoted. . .

In those days, when I had had a few glasses in company, I often grew possessed of a curious desire to sing hymns—a throw-back to my student days at Mt. Hebron Preparatory School . . lately I had taken to singing the vociferous, rough burlesques of the hymnal that the I. W. W.'s had composed. . .

"Remember Sandburg's poem to Billy Sunday, in *The Masses?*"

"Yes! 'You go about, yelling and tearing your shirt.' I think that's the way it goes, or something like that—'yelling and tearing your shirt, telling us all about Jesus . . I'd like to know what the hell you know about Jesus!' "

So we shouted burlesque hymns, and quoted Radical rhymes about Christ. . .

. . . . . .

Then, like something far-away and primitive, but growing steadily in strength, rose a processional of grave and strange music,—rose two women's voices . . the voices of the cook and the maid back in the kitchen . . blending sweetly in hymn after hymn. . .

"Shh! listen!"

"By God, they're gorgeous!"

Gaige and I were moved to shouts of applause . . pounding admiringly on the table . . in answer, from without, the hymns rose still louder and sweeter. . .

"They've understood, all right!" Mary whispered in a frightened voice, "and they're trying to counteract—on Christmas Day—trying to sing the Evil away." . .

"It makes one almost superstitious."

. . . . . .

The maid emerged from the kitchen at intervals as from a barricade, under a flag of truce. . .

The cook remained unseen, like the commander of a fort hard-beset by the enemy. . .

It was the same at supper. . .

"Now you foolish boys have done it!"

The two kept on singing,—terror, supplication, and a weird beauty in their voices. . .

"Won't they ever stop?"

"I don't dare go out and stop them!"—Mary.

It was after midnight before they had done singing, in the kitchen.

But early the next morning their hymns began again.

It was uncanny and shivery.

. . . . . .

When Danforth and his wife and household returned, no persuasion on his part could keep the Finnish help from departure. . .

It was in vain that Ona—back again between lectures—threw her weight into the effort at persuasion——

"Mary's conjecture was right," explained Ona—"they swear they couldn't stay on in the house . . 'God himself would be angry at them if they stayed on any longer, after the master got back.'"

"Now you boys have put me in a fix."—Danforth, turning to Gaige and me.

We were crestfallen. . .

"They told me," Ona continued, "that they thought, for a while, that God might at any moment drop a bolt of lightning through the roof,— so they sang and sang hymns, to counteract the blasphemous utterances they had heard."

Danforth, forgetting his no-slight pique, was immediately interested in the folklore of the case. . .

"As for me," put in Alice Juvenal sarcastically, "I predict that both Gregory and Gaige will end up under the wing of the Pope."

"The point I'm considering mostly is, where I shall find such good servants again, to take the place of the ones that left."

"Easy enough!" Ona assured him. "I'll march back to the agency and bring two more Finns . . but this time I'll take care not to pick out help deeply grounded in primitive Lutheranism."

. . . . . .

"Can't we be just friends?" Gemma pleaded.

"Yes, but I—I want you."

"You don't anything of the sort, Johnny . . you can't tell me you don't have other women—that you haven't another now?"

"Gemma, I swear I haven't."

"Anyhow, let's just be friends." She pecked me with a slight kiss on one cheek— "Besides, I have a man already—a man I'm desperately in love with."

"Where is he, Gemma?—I've never seen him."

After a long pause, weighing whether she should speak of it or not——

"He's in New Mexico," lifting eyelashes wet with tears, "curing himself of consumption."

"Oh, I see." . . I exclaimed, sorry.

. . . . . .

"But, Gemma, confess . . since we're going to be real friends . . aren't you of the frigid type of American woman?"

She turned quickly,—a starved flame in her eyes which she controlled into prompt subsidence——

"If I loved you,—you'd find out!" . .

. . . . . .

I was proud to walk along the street by Gemma's side . . she was slim, beautiful, not too tall . . and the ermine coat she wore made her look stunning . . though under it was always the plainest of dresses. . .

Her face bloomed lovely and fresh as a flower, up out of her sumptuous furs. . .

Her anomalous coat—it was the one and only thing she had fetched with her from her wealthy home, when she had had her last quarrel with her father . . who had tried to force her to marry a man she didn't care for . . tried to break her from her poor young newspaper man who was now being cured of consumption in New Mexico. . .

"He threw it up to me, that everything I had, he had provided me with, as an argument that I ought to do as he wished . . when he said *that*, I swore I would go away with only one dress, and that the plainest, on my back. . .

"But it was cold—and I succumbed to this coat of ermine."

"When Saint Francis of Assisi had a quarrel with his father, and was told the identical thing by the latter—he heaped his robes at the old fellow's feet, and walked off naked—saying, 'Take what belongs to you'—or something similar—'myself, I belong to God.'" . .

. . . . . .

"Gemma, do you know—when I'm with you, I feel as if some beautiful girl of the English aristocracy were walking by my side?"

"Do you?" she responded, gratified. . .

"Gemma," I continued—the use of the word "English" starting anew a train of thought that had been long smouldering within me—"do you know, I think I ought to go away somewhere, from here . . make a definite break with all this life, put myself into an utterly new environment—beginning my literary career all over again. . beginning RIGHT this time!"

"But haven't you begun right?"

"No, I haven't . . and I'm in a most disastrous situation."

"Indeed? But where would you go to—where else, beside New York?

"Boston has been dead as a literary center for fifty years . . and there's no other city in America——"

"For weeks, for months, I've been thinking of England—of London. . .

"The English people, the English Intellectuals, are the most hospitable people in the world . . look how they received Joaquin Miller when he was over there."

"That was because he acted up to their fantastic conception of what an American was. . .

"He wore high cowhide boots and a sombrero . . and he dumped a hatful of roses over Lillie Langtry or some other then famous beauty—when he was there." . .

"I'd find a lot of fun, acting up to them, too!" I said, unexpectedly even to myself.

. . . . . .

It had all my life been my custom when meditating some new departure, to work up my resolution, to the point of action, by talking and talking about it, to my friends and acquaintances, till they avoided my very presence. . .

Now it was with my forthcoming London trip that I bored my Village friends.

Finally Janice, apt to aid and suggest, "Johnny, if you really want to go abroad and have no money for steamship-passage, I think I can easily fix it up for you. . .

"There's my friend Ealing, of the Immigration Board. . .

"Ealing's one of us. . .

"Every so often he has a crazy man on his hands, to be deported back to the country of his birth . . and each crazy man has to have an attendant. . .

"No, you don't have to stay in the same room with the fellow"—here the bunch laughed—"the task is quite easy; you get all the accommodations of a regular passenger. . .

"Each attendant receives, if I'm not mistaken, a few dollars besides, and passage back. . .

"But most of the unfortunates deported are sent to the Northern countries."

"But England's my objective—not Sweden or Norway."

"I'll see what I can do."

"If you don't start soon," Grayson exclaimed, slapping me on the back, "and stop talking about it, we'll all get together and have you shanghaied."

The course of true friendship, of recent days, had not run smoothly between me and Janice . . a note of high irritation often came into our voices, and we jangled together over every topic that came up for discussion. . .

Could it have been subconscious resentment, welling up at last from her inmost feminine being, that caused this? Resentment over my not having accepted her proposal of marriage? . .

Soon, however, Janice was to meet her fate.

. . . . . .

Her fate was Wilmer Buffin . . who one day, unheralded, drifted insouciantly into the rooms of The Radical Club . . Wilmer Buffin, recently back from Holmdale, the artist colony up in New York State.

Buffin was clad in knickers of plum-colored velour, wore a plum-colored silk shirt. . .

An effieminacy,—savage and cruel, not gentle and soft, shone

smoothly as the surface of a mirror in his hard, strong, gleaming eyes. . .

He spoke of himself as an æsthetician, an appreciator. . .

"The æsthetic values of poetry," "the æsthetic values" of this and of that—a phrase that characterized him wherever he went.

I noticed his strong, white hands closing powerfully over the arm of a chair in a caressing crush . . it was the best chair in The Radical Club which he now preëmpted.

Janice was there, that Saturday afternoon. She went over to him immediately, as one who obeys a signal,—drew up a footstool, sat in listening silence at his feet.

"Do you see that?" whispered Grayson.

"Do I SEE it," I replied; "who could help seeing it?"

Wilmer Buffin leaned back, half-closing his eyes like a voluptuary, enjoying his easy dominancy. . .

"The æsthetic value, for instance, of this wallpaper, is practically nil. It should be a dull silver, or one of the other cool, reasonable colors."

" 'Cool, reasonable colors'—who ever heard of a color's being either 'cool' or 'reasonable'—especially 'reasonable' "—Grayson, aside, to me.

"You *have!* Just now!" I gave him a poke in the ribs.

It was Grayson who had picked out the wallpaper for the club rooms.

All the women, however, were murmuring approval of Buffin and his pronouncements. . .

"He's a weak sister!" Dannen said to me and Grayson.

"Like hell he is!" I replied.

. . . . . .

When, a week later, I strolled forebodingly into Janice's apartment and saw that the wallpaper had been changed to another paper of silvery grey, I did not need that discovery to inform me of the crash of Wilmer Buffin's trap about Janice Godman.

. . . . . .

Most of the men were open in disclaiming him as one of us.

"Damn Momma's boy . . lives on an income from his mother."

"—First spoiled by his mother, then spoiled by his succession of women—strong, fine women—that fall for just such a fellow. . ."

"—Gets them through their maternal instincts, then dominates and crushes them!"

"I think you men are a trifle unfair . . aren't some of you just a bit jealous of him?" It was I who put the question to Alverson, Grayson, Dannen, and Parnell. . .

"—Jealous?" Grayson interjected with an oath; "jealous of a lad who goes about in plum-colored knickers . . sits about on rocks all day, up at Holmdale—oh, I've heard of his maneuvers—reading aloud to himself from Mosher reprints——

" 'How Simon met Simonetta in the glad, green springtide,' " he mimicked the general idea mincingly . . but did not catch a likeness to Buffin's steady, strong voice that purred softly, but powerfully as a dynamo. . .

"Why shouldn't he sit about on rocks and read poetry aloud to himself, if he finds pleasure in doing it?" I asked. "That's his way of enjoying life, Frank, just as it's your way building that house of yours, up on the Hudson, bit by bit, with your own hands, touching every board and shingle yourself."

"Yes, Frank, I must say your viewpoint's distinctly utilitarian," Alverson advised, who, in Frank's crack about "Simon and Simonetta" detected a glancing blow at the early Italian literature he loved and thoroughly knew.

"But, Junius, you dislike him as much as the rest of us!"—Dannen.

"—On the ground that he's a super-egotist and hard as death to any woman he has anything to do with, not"—turning to Grayson—"because he prefers reading poetry aloud to himself to Every-Man-His-Own-Carpenter!"

. . . . . .

"You, Johnny, mustn't abandon me—I mean our friendship"—Janice corrected. Did I detect a note of desperation in her voice? . .

"All the others, they—I'm afraid they don't—quite like my Wilmer. . .

"He doesn't compromise one whit, you know."

Proceeding timidly, and in a manner distinctly foreign to her, she almost begged, after some hesitancy——

"Come and be friends to both of us." . .

"He's got some good ideas about poetry," I answered evasively. . .

And I paid Janice several visits in her new situation.

. . . . . .

It was true, Buffin did have some good ideas about poetry, and, as I waived aside my instinctive dislike of him, I discovered in him a vein of poetic appreciation that pleased me . . a genuine vein, though not mine . . his passion went into the crepuscular, silver poets. He loved Lionel Johnson, Richard Middleton, Novalis, Ernest Dowson (not the Dowson of "I have been faithful to you in my fashion" but he of the sad twilights of young dissolution) . . all the musicians of dusks and umber twilights in which one bird sang where all the rest was silence.

"I'm glad you don't dislike him." Janice clung to one of my hands, accompanying me to the door. . .

"You must come and have dinner again with us, soon!"

Still clinging to me forlornly, reluctant to let go, she accompanied me further down the hall, to the top of the steps, and then, three or four steps down the stairs. . .

My sense of the dramatic bade me stop on the first landing down, and look back. . .

Janice was ascending the few steps back as if she were dragging a load up with her. . . I had never seen her walk like that before. . .

I mustn't abandon my old friend! Her soul was in trouble.

. . . . . .

Finding the door of Janice's apartment open, and momentarily forgetting the changes in her ménage, I strode in without being bidden to enter.

I heard Janice at the telephone. It pleased me to hear her voice resounding vigorously. I saw Buffin sitting on the couch, with another woman beside him. . .

Cool and suave, Buffin introduced me to Ellen Woodbridge, whose reputation I instantly recalled to mind.

Ellen Woodbridge was the well-known woman recluse-painter who had also lived at Holmdale . . now, quiet and sad, like a tame, white mouse,—she was sitting at Buffin's side . . acknowledging my introduction by a slack nod . . then turning to look into Buffin's face with ghastly fondness . . all her being and vitality seeming to have gone into him. . .

"—And if you print one line that's scandalous . . about us—"

Janice was crying in a clear voice over the phone, "you'll have—hello—do you hear?—the biggest suit for libel New York ever saw!——"

There was still another woman present whom I had not hitherto noticed, she sat so quiet . . she hurried up to Janice, firmly forcing her away from the receiver and mouthpiece. . .

"Janice, my dear—you're too excited . . you'll mess up the whole situation, make it worse, instead of mending it . . let me talk to the young man!"

It was Clara Janning who seemed, at one sweep of quiet, assured power, to have taken into her charge an extreme situation I was not yet "in on."

"Listen to me, young man,—take a tip from me and don't print that story till you're absolutely sure of your facts. . .

"—better come around and see Mr. Buffin——"

Buffin hurriedly rose at this, with a disclaiming gesture, but Clara Janning made a vigorous motion in return that sat him down like a push. . .

"—See Mr. Buffin, and listen to his side of the case. . ."

Janice, in the meantime, had flung herself down in an armchair, quivering with rage . . covering her face an instant, then looking up with an attempt at serenity and nonchalance of expression. . .

"Johnny, you've dropped in at a crucial moment—" trying to achieve her old courageous impersonality——

"Wilmer and I were married—were married," she repeated, "last week . . over in Jersey, before a Justice of Peace—and—this is Wilmer's other sweetheart, and also, my dearest friend." She waved her hand toward Ellen Woodbridge.

"Oh, my God, Janice!" Buffin's voice girded in exclamatory command. . .

Giving her husband a level glance—but with difficulty—she repeated——

"Ellen Woodbridge, now my dearest friend. . .

"You know her painting, Johnny?" . .

"Of course I do . . and admire it very much."

"Well, to come to the point,—all three of us are living here together under the same roof . . and I don't see why we shouldn't . .

though the newspaper man that's gotten wind of the story seems to think it something extraordinary."

Wilmer Buffin cut in with—"Janice, won't you please shut up!"

"Wilmer dear, I won't shut up. . .

"Ellen was lonely up there in the woods, you see . . and I made Wilmer have her down to stay with us . . for a while . . to break off gradually from him . . so she could still have him around, till her unhappiness grew less——"

Buffin, scarlet-faced with bafflement and chagrin,—forced a wan smile. . .

I was astonished to be tipped the wink of satisfaction from Clara Janning, still at the 'phone, laying down the law to the newspaper man.

. . . . . .

"Yes, I'm sure it will work out; for aren't we all intelligent people, and Radicals? And hasn't the time come for people like us, who are on the firing line of progress, to face, instead of evading, these situations that arise in our emotional lives?"

"Janice dear, do let's talk of something else," Buffin urged. . .

. . . . . .

We did talk of something else. We talked of the drama. The drama was beginning to be in the air with us and the idea of starting a Little Theater of our own, in the Village, because Broadway had become stereotyped and intolerable:

"Leonard Grassmer says, for instance, that no play that ended unhappily would be tolerated by his audiences."

"Grassmer bores me, with his priest's collars and his poses. His audiences! Are there no other audiences but his audiences?

"And Phelps Madigan, the ex-circus man who strayed into the drama fresh from the sawdust . . what the devil's either of these fellows know about the drama?"

"Whatever they know—the fact remains that they're the dictators of the theater to-day."

"There's no getting around that fact," pursued Janice, "but—sometimes—I have a vision"— she paused to take up—"out there in the dark wait thousands, an inarticulate audience of people of intelligence, waiting for plays that ring sincerely and that have nothing of the theatrically shoddy in them."

"Janice, you're right. I've been thinking the same, a long time."

"Now I myself have a play in mind," resumed Janice, "where two women rationalize their lives, and learn how to live together, sharing the one and only man—" Her voice dropped, when Buffin rayed a commanding beam of flaming warning, from his eyes to hers . . Ellen Woodbridge, looking down nervously, broke into tears.

. . . . . .

"Mack," observed Frank Grayson to Mack Dannen, "the Club's running behind in funds for up-keep, little as that amounts to. Members are lax in payment of dues as all members of clubs are, unless you keep after them . . we'll have to do something to make up the deficit. . ."

And so the scheme for giving the Radical Club's annual dance was devised. . .

Why not capitalize, so to speak, the fame of the Radical Club and of its background, the Village, in order to keep the former clear of indebtedness? . . In order to provide more funds for fitting the rooms up better?

Also, the Group were thinking of taking an entire house back of Grayson's place, out on the Hudson, where members, at nominal expense, might put up for week-ends. . .

"There's Wieland Hall . . it wouldn't come to much for the night . . and it's six times bigger than a country barn . . why not run a dance there, some Saturday night?"

"Wouldn't the club rooms do?"—Dannen, cautiously practical.

"Nope. We've got to paint this on a larger canvas!" said Grayson.

. . . . . .

For the first Pagan Processional a glorious poster was gotten up by Ben Masker, one of the better known artists of *The Proletarian.* It depicted a great, green-bodied faun running across a crimson sky at full speed. A slim, golden girl rode, gleefully naked, on his shoulder, her face thrown up and backward, her hair bridging the wind in a flame of gold. . .

A unit in enthusiasm, the entire Club turned to valiantly, to do all the work of distributing posters, mailing out circulars, preparing the paraphernalia for the pageant-parade to be given at the stroke of midnight, the night of the first Processional! . .

The Club rooms seethed with happy excitement and hiving industry, as the time verged close.

. . . . . .

In spite of her piteous appeal to me "not to abandon her"—an appeal delivered to me, but meant for all of us—I could not overlook the fact that I was no longer welcome at Janice's as I had been . . though Janice and I had vowed we would remain friends, bound together in the common cause of poetry, no matter what happened to us emotionally. . .

But, at present, when Wilmer Buffin was not in, she received me abstractedly. When Buffin was present, a sullen atmosphere descended that I was glad to escape from. . .

Billy Saunders had wandered forth . . Constance, the little Jukes child, moved about, suppressed and wistful, from room to room. . .

Buffin, it was reported, hated having the child about. . .

Ellen Woodbridge had left the apartment, the report was, looking like death.

Janice's challenging defense—the few times we saw her about the club—was that Ellen had proved too weak to stay and cope with the situation. . .

. . . . . .

"You MUST come to the Pagan Processional, Johnny."

"—Can't afford it, Frank. . . I'm broke."

"We understand that," answered Grayson, "that's why I'm sending you two comps. through the mail."

I was going to add that I knew no one to bring for a dancing partner, but my pride forbade my making that admission: Grayson must never learn that all the girls that I had had—they had gone back on me. . .

They had . . and they hadn't:

My running from one to another . . my flightiness . . my lack of money . . my economic inability to dress well . . all, and other things more subtle,—counted against me . . and, in spite of a series of philanderings, at present I was lonely as a monk in the Thebaid. . .

. . . . . .

Gemma Donne could not go with me to the Pagan Processional. She had promised to go with Ben Masker.

How about Mera Harmer?

It seemed that the women that I had not known intimately, in a physical sense, remained my best friends. . . Mera Harmer and Gemma Donne, for instance.

I would not have thought of asking the former to go to the dance, but that, recently, when I was having tea with her, her father had walked in on us . . it had been a tense moment . . but, the great-bodied, leonine old fellow,—he and I had apparently hit it off! . . As we two talked, his daughter glanced at him fondly yet apprehensively, from time to time.

Yes, her father had evidently liked me . . her father, under whose thumb she was . . he would now not object if I took his daughter to the Processional with me, I surmised.

But when I asked her, she assured me her father would never consent. . .

"But me—I'm sure he liked me, the other afternoon!"

"He does rather like you . . in fact, he's admitted as much to me . . would you care to hear the exact words he said——"

"Yes."

"He said you had the gift of making people like you . . that you had fine points . . he's given me permission to have you in to tea, any time . . that's a big concession, from him . . it's other people's conception of you he doesn't relish——"

"In other words, you may see me in private, but we're never to be seen in public together?"

"He says it's a shame—that you've begun all wrong—that at core you're really a gentleman, have the makings of a great literary man——"

. . . . . .

I was suddenly impatient——

"Why not give the old duffer the slip," I took out my irritation at her father's patronage by calling him, to his daughter, "old duffer,"—"give him the slip, and come to the dance with me anyhow."

"My father's not an 'old duffer,' please!"

"I said that because I resent his high-hat proclivities, and his being disingenuously willing to let you have me to tea, while——"

"I accept the apology—" cutting me short.

"You're under the domination of your father . . you've got a father-complex pretty bad. I believe the only reason you like me is that I have a big chest like his."

"Yes?" she queried acidly.

We were verging upon a quarrel.

But instantly she thought better.

"Poor boy! . . You're having a hard time. I'm so sorry."

I double-damned myself for the tears that sprang into my eyes.

She rose and stood over me where I sat, softly stroking my hair.

. . . . . .

Very well, I would go to the Pagan Processional alone.

Maybe after all it would be better to go alone. Who knows, I might find there the One Woman I was (or thought I was) endlessly seeking. And, alone and free, I would be the readier for her.

Mera volunteered to fit me up with a costume, since I was broke, furnishing the material herself.

"Your arms and legs are not thick enough in proportion to your torso," she said, meditatively . . then,—"I have it. . .

"You shall go as an Assyrian king—Asshurbanipal——"

She brought forth a tape measure and straightway, business-like, began measuring me for my attire.

Since she had seen tears in my eyes, a patient, sisterly tenderness had risen in her for me. . .

"You'll wear a jet-black wig and a beard. . .

"When you fill out more I predict you'll not be a bad-looking man . . the beard will make your face fuller . . will make you seem almost a handsome man."

. . . . . .

It was a long white robe she had prepared for me, it had long sleeves.

She had stenciled a procession of very small ochre lions striding around the edge of the robe . . a tin scimitar and an Assyrian helmet made out of what had been a wash-basin completed my outfit. . .

"There . . now you're a fine man!"

She stood back, appraising me. . .

"Thanks . . a thousand thanks, Mera!"

"—Wish I could go, too!" forgetfully she said. . .

"Come on, then!" I cried, impetuously.

"I might drop in," she continued abstractedly, "and sit in one of the boxes with Allan Masson, if I can persuade him—" she grew confused, seeing my hurt expression—"Oh, I'm sorry! . . Oh, Johnny, can't you see how it is?"

. . . . . .

The first Pagan Processional was an evident success.

Outside, the street was thick with taxis that could not move except by creeping, because of their obstructing multitude. . .

Milling crowds jammed the entrance of Wieland Hall.

When you succeeded in smashing your way in past the door,—inside you found restless, excited mobs pouring up and down the long staircases, on each side. . .

The Virgilian comparison of a multitude, to ants and bees seething thick and swirling and clinging in hordes, here exactly applied. . .

"It's a great success!" Grayson shouted above the din,—pushing by and thwacking me between the shoulders; "that's a fine costume you have on, but where's your girl?"

I didn't answer, but merged myself in the ascending crowd and was thrust on and up by propelling masses. . .

I was caught amid the dancers and had difficulty extricating myself as I headed toward the bar—extricating myself from the great mob, whirling round and round, swirling slowly up and down, going bump, bump, bump,—in seas of shoulders, arms, hips, legs, squirming, mixing, colliding. . .

. . . . . .

The crush about the bar sounded like a battle.

The liquor concession was a big item in the affair.

. . . . . .

With the boldness of a few drinks, I had found a girl I did not know, to dance with me.

Frank Grayson again pushed by me, wading through the throng up to his shoulders. He looked worried.

"What's the matter, Frank?" I hailed him robustly, confident because of the girl on my arm. . .

"Everybody's drinking too soon," he answered, "and too much, for things to run smoothly to the end."

"Don't worry till something happens."

"I'm not worrying about our own people . . nor about Emma

Silverman's bunch . . it's the outsiders we've attracted—there's bound to be some rough-necks and smart-alecks among them who'll give us trouble."

"The Wieland boys"—there were six of them—brothers—of all sizes, all having massive shoulders and combatively placid faces—"they'll take care of rowdies . . and I'd hate to run foul of some of the plainclothes men I've seen standing about, chewing their cigars!"

Frank seemed reassured:

"I guess things will turn out all right. . .

"I forgot the Wieland Boys have Tammany back of them," and, his face of apprehension relaxing, he clutched his partner close and swayed off into the dance.

. . . . . .

I caught one girl after another, and held her briefly as my dance-partner.

Every so often I fought my way to the bar with enthusiastic friends who insisted on treating me to yet another drink—and didn't have to insist much!

. . . . . .

Several girl-less stags had fought men who had girls, on the outskirts of the dancers . . and there had been scores of just drunken disputes. . .

The police were on our side, though—while esteeming us "nuts" and "Bohemians." . .

"We've shot some o' the bums down the backstairs like the steps was greased," observed a burly plainclothes man to Mack Dannen, "an' all youse fellers have to do is crook a finger, an' we'll put the skids under any one you say! . ."

. . . . . .

The riotous negro orchestra wove bodies and instruments amazingly into crashing, sliding, delaying African rhythms . . themselves rising one after the other and executing crazy, stationary dances over their music . . swayingly introducing wild, ribald cacophonies . . yelling, shouting, singing in accompaniment to the jungle contagion of their melodies. . .

. . . . . .

The time for the Pageant had arrived:

But none would heed for more than a moment's intermission the crashing of drums that asked for silence.

"Gregory, I've been looking for you, you're just the man!" Grayson insisted; "we want you to climb up on the platform and let that big voice of yours loose . . make the crowd be still, and urge them to move back and give the Pageant floor-space."

Another simultaneous yell and crash and rolling of drums big and little,—and riding in on the lull, I was shouting greatly and happily in drunken glory, through a megaphone,—from the platform, where I leaned, raised high over faces that looked up attentively at me. . .

My vocal chords loosened and deepened by drinks,—my great authoritative voice was obeyed and the crowd surged back, back, and back, while I was cheered acclamatively.

I loved it. . .

In the meantime the Pageant coiled around and around, an exciting glitter shining from the varied costumes and eager faces. . .

In the front moved three palanquins, empty, carried by huge, muscular Harlem negroes, nude but for loin-cloths. . .

The Palanquins were reserved for those who won First, Second and Third prizes for most beautiful costumes. . .

The prize-winners were to have the distinction of riding in triple grandeur, several times about the floor, when the rest of the pageant had ceased. . .

. . . . . .

While all this was going on, a man togged out in a South Sea Island get-up started climbing one of the pillars that reached from the balcony where the boxes were, to the roof. . .

Whoops of "Hye, get that fellow down!" and the hands of several men caught after him and dragged him back, quite tearing his exiguous costume off. . .

From one of the boxes a group of girls, two of them in ballet costume, one all stuck over with leaves,—shouted down at me——

"Ooo, ooo! Johnny!"

I looked up at them, but didn't know who they were—a small matter; I would get acquainted. They beckoned me up. The tallest of them and most attractive had hair of the color I loved—red hair that flamed. . . I hurried up the small stairs that led (fairly cleared of human obstruction), from the balcony to the boxes, and grabbed

her unceremoniously, leading her away from her two companions. . .

"How did you girls know who I was?"

"We heard somebody say who you were."

"What do you represent with all those leaves stuck over you?"

"I'm a dryad."

The Pageant was still coiling about, dragonlike. . .

"Come on, let's join the march . . we might get a ride in one of the palanquins."

We slipped in line, arm in arm. . .

"You're the girl I've been looking for a long time."

"What do you mean?"

"All my life I've been looking for a girl I could be true to—a beautiful girl that had red hair——"

At the moment of my avowal appeared the tall, drunken fellow who had been pulled back from his vociferous climb up the balcony pillar——

"Jennie, what yōu doin' there with that guy? Come on outta there!"

He burst through, snatched her back by the arm.

"Let go of her!" I commanded, sliding out too, and taking the girl's other arm, hauling in the opposite direction.

"Say! Where do you come in, you!—" and I got it between the eyes and went down.

I was up again, and at my antagonist, despite the look of pleading panic in the girl's eyes.

I struck with the broad side of my tin sword; it was a mighty swing, and its pliant blade wreathed and wrapped itself about the fellow's neck . . he gurled . . went heaving over and backward, in turn. . .

Somebody else,—one of his gang—fetched me a blow behind the ear that sent me spinning again, but not off my feet. I ricocheted into a tangled group trying to back out of the radius of the mêlée.

There plainclothesmen grabbed me, began to propel me quickly from behind.

"Hold on!"

It was Frank Grayson.

"He's one of the bunch . . we'll take care of him. . ."

"Slip out the back way, quick, Johnny!" Dannen advised.

. . . . . .

The Great Strike was on at the New Jersey silk mill town of Haller . . the strike that, ranging countrywide among the workers, was to spell the beginning of the end of The Capitalist System.

"It's here at last! The Revolution's here, at last!"

We were going to Haller to aid the strikers, and advise them . . show them the meaning of what they'd begun—the wider meaning . . the nation-wide and worldwide ramifications to follow . . how they were fighting not alone for themsleves, but for the rest of the world's workers, and for the well-being of a proletarian posterity.

Every one else carried, in his or her heart, thrilling visions of Utopia about to come at last. In my heart was a confused welter. The present excitement swayed me. . .

The actual leaders of the strike considered more exact and immediate objectives.

But they, too, from social intercourse with the literary and artistic groups of the City, were somewhat dazzled by glimpses of the Perfect Dream that has been handed down to us, from Plato to H. G. Wells.

. . . . . .

Halton Mann was eminently to the fore, great in his youth and invincible enthusiasm. . .

Already a man of prominence in the conventional literary world and one of the powers on the new big magazine, *The Metropolis*, he was, as well, an indefatigable worker on *The Proletarian*, and moved frankly in open agitation for a workingman's world.

Uncompromising in his revolutionary spirit, he was yet so fine and glorious of purpose, that men of prominence in the conservative world, could not help allowing for, though deprecating, his outspoken Radicalism——

"He's young yet!"

"Yes, give him time!"

They felt less uncomfortable when they were able to persuade themselves that Mann's idealism was a passing phase, incident to youth, that he would soon grow out of. . .

After he had had his fling, they were sure he'd settle back into the ranks of sedate success. . .

Mann lit in Haller on both feet, not alone to talk, but to fight and give himself to the top of his ability. . .

Before long, for refusing to move on, along the sidewalks, he saw himself looking out from behind bars. . .

"This will be a great thing for you, Hal!" I remarked to him, as he stood in the great cage which he shared with a restless mass of imprisoned strikers. "It'll place you in the public eye—help put your work over!"

"Gregory, if that's all you've got to say to me,—get out!

"It wasn't for that that I refused to move on . . I tell you, the time has come when no creative artist that respects his soul can compromise further. . .

"You can't palter . . you can't straddle . . you're either for or you're against the Coming Revolution! . .

"Now's the time to choose sides! . .

"But, since you've spoken of publicity, I'll give this affair all the publicity I can command—but for the sake of the strikers, not for any small aggrandizement of my own! . .

"I'll write a stirring article for *The Metropolis*—I've thought out the title already 'Sheriff Hoyle's Hotel'—by that I mean this pesthouse all of us are locked up in here—my comrades and myself——

"Won't I singe the jail-system, though! . .

"Look at this! Three hundred men crammed into one big cage, worse than a lot of monkeys. . .

"And the one or two cups that we drink out of—and the dirty toilets,—why, it's a miracle an epidemic doesn't go out from us, and strike the whole community——

"There's lice here, and all sorts of noisome bugs——

"And the grub!——"

Another man at my elbow stepped closer, a comrade I didn't know——

"Comrade Mann," he spoke, "the Sheriff hints he's willing to put you in a private cell; and we could bring in special food for you, from the outside——"

"*Say!* do you call yourself a comrade?" sweeping his hand backward in an inclusive gesture toward the mass of workers locked in with him—"these boys, *they* don't get *their* food from the outside,

and no one gives *them* private cells—I came here to be with *them*, and from now on we're in the same boat!"

Several reporters pushed up to the bars——

"Give us a good story, Hal!"

"If you boys really want a story that'll make people that have any guts in 'em, wild against The System—I'll give it to you!"

. . . . . .

"The kid's honest enough in his convictions!" remarked one of the reporters to the others,—as they were going away.

"Sure! but where'll that get him?" observed another.

"It'll get him a damn sight further than not having any convictions—or than putting decent convictions aside!" surprisingly said another. "I ask you are WE reporting the truth about this strike?—the way the strikers are being rough-housed, and framed up? the way the women and children are being treated?—not much!

"And, if we did report the facts—would our papers print them?——

"You fellows know damn well they wouldn't—and that we'd lose our jobs!"

"Ah, what's the use! . ."

. . . . . .

Back and forth we rode to and from Haller and The Strike . . we Villagers . . Janice and Lilla and Frank, and Junius, and Jessie, and Jim, and myself, and the rest. . .

Our women helped in the soup-kitchens that were run for the strikers and their families through a fund contributed by workers from all over the country. . .

Our men agitated, and exhorted the men to keep at the strike till they reached assured victory. . .

Myself—I confess I did more looking on than helping. . .

I sat about in the back rooms of saloons trying to write revolutionary poems, but the poems wouldn't come. . .

I liked the excitement, liked being spectacular——

I can't help it, if my whole heart wasn't in it! . . though I tried hard to make it be! . .

. . . . . .

"We're coming along fine!"

"Solidarity will win yet!"

"—but, say we lose this strike! at least it's a start in the right direction . . out of it the workers of Haller will have learned how to manage the next step—better!"

"Yes, and each effort will bring us nearer the great Goal!"

. . . . . .

But the strikers were having a hard time of it—a harder and harder time.

Then it was that one of our group—Lilla Matthewson, I think,—evolved what seemed a solution of part of their difficulty:

"—To witness their children suffering,—that's what always breaks the workers' hearts most, saps their stamina—in strikes!

"Now, if every Radical would volunteer to take one, two, or three children and give them comfortable homes, while the strike's on——

"Then you'd see how easily it would be won!"

The suggestion was acted on.

. . . . . .

Lilla herself took in tenderly to shield three children of Polish parents,—two of one family, one of another. . .

I paid several visits to Lilla while these children were with her.

I observed that she played the good, kind, gentle mother to them. She washed their faces, combed their hair, bought them bright toys almost daily, took them about the City to points of interest children are eager for—the Bronx Zoo, the Aquarium. . .

Caught up in the whirl and excitement of a new life, and their wants supplied lovingly, for a while they were happy. . .

After that they began to cry to go back home. . .

Lilla was vexed . . disconsolate . . what next could she do to keep them content? . .

. . . . . .

They stood in a forlorn group apart—the children.

"What in the world can I do?" Lilla asked despairfully. "I've loved and mothered them, taken them to my heart?"

"What's the matter with them?"

"They want their fathers and mothers, the poor dears!"

"That's natural. . ."

She turned to me, eyes flashing combatively.

"Why, what's the matter, Lilla?"

I was taken aback.

"What are you angry about?"

"—Nothing that you've done!

"It's the priests and ministers out there in Haller—and the letters they encourage the fathers and mothers to write. . .

"They've been stirring them up by telling them all sorts of nonsensical lies . . about their never seeing their children again—*about their children being held for sinister purposes!*"

"The filthy hounds!"

The children, huddling in the corner, and hearing our angry voices, began crying afresh.

"Oh, my poor darlings!"

Lilla was swiftly coddling all three of them in her arms at once . . stooping over them . . kneeling by them. . .

"Don't you love aunty Lilla?"

"Yes, aunty Lilla,—but——

"We want to go h-o-o-me!" wailed the boy, masculinely instituting himself spokesman. . .

. . . . . .

"I know it won't do much good—but I'll try to explain to them all over again why they must stay on a while longer—how we wish them really to have homes to go back to that they can call HOMES,—not dirty, ill-smelling hovels!"

While I sat apart, drinking my tea, she gathered them to her again, making the attempt, in the simplest words. . .

But her lovingness toward them touched their forlorn feelings to more misery. . .

Damning myself for it, tears started to stream down my cheeks, too.

"My God, Johnny,—you, too?"

"I can't help it, Lilla,—I'm such a fool!"

"Why, what's the matter with YOU?" laughing tearfully.

"God damn it—I'm sorry about everything . . about the way these children and their fathers and mothers are treated—sorry about everybody that's being evilly treated everywhere in the world. . .

"If I really thought it would do any good I'd bomb all the capitalists in the country to hell! . .

"And all the lousy kings and thieves that fatten on the world's misery——

"But it wouldn't! . .

"Oh, God,—if I only believed in the damned proletariat! . .

"But I know enough to know they're just as bad as the capitalists! . ."

I was raging,—silent tears streaming down my cheeks. . .

"Stop it, child—you're having a dreadful effect on the kids!"

They were crying very loud now.

"I tell you, I can't help it!"

Then my mind ran swiftly back several years, and I exclaimed irrelevantly (I was talking too much. I always talked too much)—"if Opal had been decent to me—I'd have written some great books, —as it is!—maybe now I'll never"——

"You poor boy—you make me feel as if I had four children here."

. . . . . .

In my inmost thought, I often wished to possess Lilla, while I instinctively knew any move toward her would have been futile, and desisted. . .

A vindictive emotion immediately supplanted my other mood——

"You make me want to mother you!" she had said. . .

"Yes, be my mother, too!" I answered, meaning by invidious implication that she had never, could never have, attracted me otherwise. . .

She started back, stung to resentment,—all the attractiveness of her still-young, thriving womanhood of which she was coquettishly conscious in any man's presence—affronted.

"Why—I'm—damn you—I'm only a year older than you are!"

The children were howling miserably.

. . . . . .

Soon haggard, excited, hysterical mothers—filled with priests' and ministers' lies (maybe the priests and ministers believed them true!) descended upon us . . and fetched their children home. . .

The children had two reasons to cry now—first, for the joy of going back home—second—for sorrow, most of them, over having to leave behind their briefly adopted "mothers" and "fathers," their better comfort, their new excitement and pleasure! . .

. . . . . .

Halton Mann was out of jail.

He had become somewhat of a national figure through the fame of the sensational, astonishingly colorful article he had written, "Sheriff Hoyle's Hotel" . . a revolutionary opus which we wondered how the more conservative editors of *The Metropolis* had been persuaded to let into the magazine's pages. . .

"We'll fix 'em yet, the thugs! . . publicity's what'll put a crimp in 'em . . crooks always mine and countermine in secrecy——

"But once lift the stone and let the sunlight in, and how the insects scurry!"

Halton Mann and I were at Lilla's.

"I've planned another stunt, that the papers will give prominent space to . . and I believe there's enough left of the old American spirit in the people's hearts to mold overwhelming public opinion in the strikers' favor—through the medium of the Capitalistic Press itself."

"What's your new stunt, Hal?"

"I'm going to hire Madison Square Garden . . have the workers put on a pageant of my own creating—*The Pageant of Labor*—showing forth the vicissitudes, sufferings, and ultimate triumph of the Proletariat!"

. . . . . .

That Pageant of Labor did come off.

Mann himself led a procession of strikers, a-foot, all the way from Haller. A long, long way for all of them,—except Mann.

The Pageant was intended both as a publicity stunt for the strikers and to raise funds for the strikers through paid admissions.

It won its first objective famously; but ended in a financial deficit.

It is rumored that Mann temporarily beggared himself to make it up.

I fully credit the rumor.

. . . . . .

Mann and myself at Lilla's again:

We had a long discussion—what are the real effects of poverty and suffering on the individual?—beneficial or otherwise?

"Pain and suffering have never been good for anybody," cried Lilla, her cheeks reddened as at personal affront, "and whenever I hear any old fogy say so, it throws me into a rage.

"Pain, suffering, poverty—never teach or help the soul a particle —instead they dispirit and deaden. . .

"Even when an individual is strong enough to rise above them, they do not benefit, but leave their scars.

"It's the whipped, complaisant cowards of life——

"Or it's, mostly, the stupid, well-fed bourgeois,—ever,—that maintain such a doctrine—which they maintain partly through romantic notions—that they derive from the stage-penury depicted in books . . or from stories of poets long-dead, like poor Chatterton——"

"But mostly," Halton Mann put in, "it's because it gives them an excuse for their own cruel neglect of those who suffer and are poor—to say that lack and penury are good for the spiritual qualities in a man!"

"They point to the saying of Christ—'The poor always ye have with you!' "

"A vile saying—if Christ ever said it, which I much doubt!"

"How is the enormous problem of poverty to be met?" I asked controversially, "by putting the world entirely on a coöperative basis with vast, new economic machinery involved?—or by doing as Jesus and St. Francis did—by giving all they possessed to mankind?"

"—pretty drastic and impractical, the latter!" observed Lilla.

"I'm sick of half-way things," shouted Mann; "why shouldn't a remedy be a drastic, impractical one, instead of some flabby palliative that but gives the disease further hold?——

"Shaw calls poverty a disease . . I say it's something worse—it's a cancer, an alien growth. . . And, without drastic surgery, applied mighty quick, civilization itself must perish of it!"

. . . . . .

At the call of Big Joe Oakman we drew together at Haller for a final effort.

"Can you speak before an audience?" Oakman asked me.

"Of course!" I had a vision of swaying an audience,—of myself, a great leader, going in front of a gathering crusade; a world of workers swarming behind me.

"Well, then, to-night, you'll follow Jack Reilly on the platform."

After much effort to find a hall, there had come forward a

Radical-minded man, an old German socialist, who was owner of one of the big halls of assemblage in Haller . . a man who dared run counter to the legal and surreptitious persecution of the police and civic authorities.

He turned his place over to us, gratis, for our last grand rally. . .

"You're taking the place of Halton Mann . . he's very sick, at present . . about to undergo an operation for appendicitis. . .

"We're putting you before Lilla Matthewson; she's speaking after you," explained Big Joe redundantly and nervously.

"Shove her on before me, Joe . . I'd like more time to gather my thoughts." Too late, I was quailing at what I was up against.

"All right, Gregory—but, mind you, don't you quit . . we're counting on you. . ."

Sam Flood, the English journalist, was out there, leading off . . though Reilly was yet to speak, after him, and after Reilly, Lilla—yet I listened in the wings like an amateur actor waiting for his cue and licking his lips feverishly. . .

The platform was really a stage, where theatricals took place . . and there were wings and dressing-rooms.

I plumped down at a small, rickety table, hoping to muster on a bit of paper an outline of what I was to say. But nothing would muster.

. . . . . .

"Hey, does any one know where Jack Reilly is?"

"Here, one of you fellows run down to the bar. He was there the last time I saw him."

Jack Reilly wasn't at the bar, the breathless report was.

"Anyhow—he'll be here in a few minutes. . . Here, Lilla, you go on!"

I had broken into a sweat, fearing it was to be me,—seeing Big Joe's one eye rove over at me speculatively; fearing that, despite his promise, he might have changed his mind as to the order of my speech.

Lilla was shoved on.

I listened from the wings. Her contralto voice rose clear and strong. It was a lovely voice. Her speech was taking.

Such roaring must have filled a Roman amphitheater. . .

Laughter, jeers at the silk mill owners, and isolated calls gave a

stupendous sense of the creature bigness of the crowd out there. . .

"Good girl!" "Fine work!" Lilla was off . . being complimented . . her face a-flush with enthusiasm. . . Big Joe clapping her ponderously on the back, and she beaming at him affectionately, worshipfully. . .

"—Your turn, Johnny,—but, remember—talk general . . give 'em no incendiary particulars . . there's a lot of Federal agents and dicks hanging 'round, out there, planted . . and they've made an open boast that they're going to get some of us for what we say to-night!"

"But how *can* they get us, Joe?"

"Ask the penitentiary doors that, after they've slammed to behind you for ten years!"

That didn't sound very promising. All the fine fabric of my heroically determined speech fell away.

I protested, but in hollow fashion, against being dictated to, what to say.

"Remember, Gregory," exclaimed Joe, "after all, you're an outsider"—taking my protest seriously—"an outsider, and you don't know a damn item about the practical workings of the I. W. W."

"But isn't the actual Revolution to start from here?"

"Oh, you just forget that, my boy, and give 'em a general talk—say, on the woes of the Pyramid Builders, or the coolies that built the Great Wall of China, or the Hindoos that dug the Suez Canal—or anything else—and leave the present problem to fellows like Jack Reilly and me . . who know just what to say and do, from long training and experience in the Movement."

I was pushed out by the shoulders.

"Hop on! they're growing restless . . we've got to keep 'em interested till Jack comes."

. . . . . .

I was looking down on, and over, an upturned wide blotch of pasty white, several thousand faces fused into one mammoth countenance blurred with twice as many eyes and ears, and as many noses and gaping mouths. I thought of the mouths and noses in Gemma Donne's drawings for the *Proletarian*. . .

At the initial, expectant applause I shrank back.

If, the next instant, I had found myself in an amphitheater, waiting for the wild beast to bound out, with which I was to wage mortal combat for my life, or if there had waddled toward me a big man wielding a net and trident, I should not have been surprised. . .

"Make your voice boom!" Frank Grayson had advised, at the Pagan Processional. And I had. . .

But here it came from my throat, small and tiny.

. . . . . .

Very well, I would give them a talk on the Ultimate Ideal—

The Ultimate Ideal of the world set free to write poems, paint pictures, model statuary, read in great libraries the classics of all literatures,—discuss, put on plays, make love: after a marginal, general hour or two of daily necessary work, shared in, without respect of person, by all mankind! . . .

. . . . . .

Soon I felt a chill, invisible but real Something vastly lapping up about me . . though psychic, as actual as the platform I was standing on—a wide propulsion sweeping up from that restless mob against me. . .

Their first vague restless whispering mounted to an audible murmur.

They began milling about like a great herd of restless cattle. . .

They were talking openly now, back and forth with each other—those hundreds of strikers, standing on the floor . . packed there, without seats . . not understanding a word of what I was saying. . .

I shrank back from them, drawing myself into an infinitesimal point of dividuality.

I stopped, put my hand to my head, stumbled out—sick!

"Well, you're not much of a labor leader!"—exclaimed Big Joe Oakman, jocose, and laying a heavy, sympathetic hand on my shoulder—"but you've killed time for us till our wild Irishman arrived! . ."

Murmuring manfully, "It's a shame, it is, a man couldn't stop fer an extry glass o' beer!" Jack Reilly pushed up, fiery and thin, his shock of brindled hair toppling over one of his wan blue eyes and his ashen, twisted face.

. . . . . .

"Jack's got 'em!" exclaimed Lilla, clasping her hands together unconsciously with a gesture like praying. . .

"Yes, he's talking to them in their own way. . ."

As the frail, eloquent Irishman dropped back among us, the clapping of hands, the roar of acclaiming voices, was deafening. . .

"Be Jasus, I guv 'em the Gospel, all right!"

But Big Joe Oakman was blanched with resentment, and—was it also fright?

"Jack—I warned you to look out!—the Dicks!"

"Oh, to hell wit' the Dicks!" responded Reilly, pushing back his lock of brindled hair from over one eye, to let it lop over the other one fiercely— "I'm askin' ye, Big Joe, what else am I a labor leader fer?—an' you?"

"But—what's the use of—?"

"Look ye here, Joe, it's our job to go to jail fer them, just as it is their job to sthrike!"

Lilla caught the hands of the tall, gaunt, heroic Irish labor leader in hers . . pressed them to her cheek—

"Jack, you're right! you're right!" she cried.

"Shure I'm right! Don't I know it?"

"You talked Direct Action . . advised 'em to acts of sabotage . . told 'em if they had to go back to work, to do so in seeming peace—but to malinger on the job, and slip things into the machinery . . heave bricks through the Company's windows, on the sly . . tell about the metal worked into the silks—"

"You're domn right I did!"

"The Pen!"

"But wasn't I just after telling ye to go to th' pen 's a part o' me job—just as it's a part o' yours?"—Reilly retorted witheringly to the big, one-eyed I. W. W. leader.

. . . . . .

Riding back to the city on the train with Lilla and the bunch, I was, for me, unusually silent.

For the first time in my life, I had sensed directly that enormous, ruthless, unthinking and idiot power latent in masses of people . . and it had appalled me.

. . . . . .

The authorities had been quick to act after that memorable mass meeting.

Reilly and poor Sam Flood were indicted, tried, convicted, pushed off to the Pen.

As for myself, for months I carried a sense of secret shame within, for not having also dared and incurred prosecution.

It mattered not that I kept assuring myself that my poetry should come first, that I was not myself certain just how much, or whether I believed at all, in The Revolution.

In honesty, I confessed that, since these things were so as regarded myself, I should either have gone the distance or not entered into the race.

I often wondered how Big Joe Oakman felt!

. . . . . .

Battering about, living from hand to mouth—and sometimes it was a long way from the hand to the mouth—my daily existence became, if possible, a more precarious affair than ever.

I had borrowed such an amount of dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars from friends, here and there and yon, that I was ashamed to strike them for more.

Again one or two of my friends tendered proposals that I take some part-time job or other . . but when almost willing to do so, to my relief no such job proved forthcoming.

"I know it's a bad system for artists, for writers—but wouldn't it be better to hold down a job and enjoy the consequent relief from economic worry,—than be continually harassed? so harassed that at times you're haggard, sick-looking? . .

"I'm sure that, under the present circumstances, the creative work you achieve's mighty little. . .

"And you have even less time for your writing, because of the continual uncertainty that harasses you, than you would if you held a day-long job that would leave you your evenings to write in, free from distress——

"There's 'Red' Flatman—holds a job as publisher's reader—writes at night on a book——"

"No!" I answered Frank Grayson, grinding my teeth like a soul in Purgatory.

"I'll die first, before I'll take a job now . . I've gone too far to turn back."

. . . . . .

But my London trip——

That summer I oscillated between Danforth's home on Long Island and Frank Grayson's house up on the Hudson . . day in and day out dinning the ears of my friends with what I intended doing when I reached London. . .

The early Fall found me at Graysaxe . . moved in there with all my possessions, quite defeated, but unwilling to admit my defeat. . .

After another of their intermittent amatory separations, Frank and Minnie were together again . . during the week living in their town flat and attending to their jobs in the City . . spending week-ends at Graysaxe. . .

"While we're away, the place is yours. You can do as you please . . have anybody up that you please—" Grayson assured me, stressing the latter part of his invitation.

"Yes," added Minnie, "and you may use our charge-account at the grocery store down at the foot of the hill."

"How can I ever thank you and Minnie enough, Frank!"

"By making good, my boy . . by making good!" answered the practical, generous Grayson. . .

"All I needed was this last chance!" I was trying to assure myself, rather than them—"Now I'll do a long play—have it produced —make a sensation with it—all my troubles, then, economically speaking, will be over!"

"Dear Johnny, we hope so!"—Minnie.

. . . . . .

It brought a healing that I needed, the being alone there for three or four days at a stretch, each week.

The only sound, during the days, on that hill set in the sky, was the twittering of the few birds left, the appeasing noises of natural life. . .

And, at night, the train whistles—at night, they were heard and noticed more than during the day . . at night they sounded romantic and far away, announcing to me the glamor and glow of the great cities of the world that waited me when I was famous.

From the crest, in the dark, I could look southward toward the

fringing glimmer of light that was New York . . and from New York, my fancy moved on to London. . .

Minnie had brought me two new books, the first two volumes of Rolland's Jean Christophe; their like I had never seen before.

I realized that what had been the matter with me was that I had been the victim of a beautiful and foolish dream of adolescence—the dream of dying, a poor poet, in a garret—afterward to come into a great inheritance of posthumous fame. . .

Romain Rolland's books uprooted from my subconscious mind that adolescent dream of posthumous fame that had been dominating me. It sowed in its place a greater hope—a hope of fame earned by days and nights of laborious creative work. I would quit whirling about. . .

. . . . . .

The Stage would be my first step.

I would write a great play.

The stupid Grassmer tradition of stale realism and the trite happy ending must be broken. I was convinced that it was my work that was designed to effect that consummation.

In the background of my mind was slowly flowering a majestic blank verse tragedy so quick and natural in its turns of verbal felicity, so sure in its humanness that when written and produced it would sweep all audiences before it.

. . . . . .

Across the valley on top of an equal hill, sat three or four houses, —a nest of actors, playwrights, and producers who were successful on Broadway. . .

When I had outlined not only my blank verse tragedy, but a new idea in addition—a rhymed romantic melodrama—to Frank and Minnie,—Minnie cried enthusiastically:

"That's fine! . . Nothing could be more pat!

"Just across the way Jane Chevering lives—the celebrated actress . . and Arthur Stahl, her husband, a playwright who has two Broadway successes to his credit. . . 'The Other Chair' 's the latest . . and Flora Minturn lives there, who wrote the comedy 'Where's my Baby?' . . And her husband the producer, Lucian Wolter——"

"Just the people for Johnny to meet!"—Frank.

"Do you know them?" I asked, trying ill to conceal my awe and respect for any one celebrated . . to seem more indifferent, adding —"Wonder if they have any ideas at all beyond the regular, commercial, Grassmerian Drama!"

"Oh, yes,—certainly they have," Minnie assured me eagerly, "Frank plays tennis with them every week-end, don't you, Frank?"

"What has playing tennis got to do with their having ideas?" I asked teasing.

Both Frank and I caught at the opportunity to bait Minnie for her non-sequitur. We evoked the usual and amusing scene of her cheeks flushing, her eyes starting indignantly . . she rushed at us, and beat at us with her hands, in hysterical, vexed merriment, chasing us around the table. . .

"Well, anyhow, we'll take you over there, the first Sunday they're up!" I was promised.

Priggishly I affected not caring either one way or the other.

. . . . . .

We fell a-talking of the different people we knew who played about the edges of our life in Greenwich Village—"Half-Villagers" we dubbed them. . .

Mentioning my pale, slight friend, Mera Harmer, I learned to my surprise that she had been around to the Radical Club several times and that she had met Frank and Minnie and others of the Club, there.

"Didn't she ever speak of me?" I asked.

"No. . ."

"I wonder why not?" I asked again, piqued.

"Because she never had occasion to, I suppose." Frank was probing. "Do you know her—very well?" emphasizing the "very well" in the sly manner customary to men, though unusual with him. . .

"Quite well," I rejoined in the same tone, my vanity weakly not allowing me to correct the glint that shone in Frank's eye.

"Well," Minnie spoke up, "I don't see any reason why you can't have her up here to visit you."—her suggestion also taking my affirmation to mean what Frank had understood.

"All right . . I'll drop her a line to come and see me, if you wouldn't mind."

"You know we have an extra room—if that turns out to be necessary!" Frank assured me playfully.

"—But she might not be able to come up!" I added, rather shamefaced; then, "Her father, you see—I'll tell you what, why don't you write her, inviting her up yourself?" I asked Minnie.

. . . . . .

As a guest of Minnie's Mera received permission of her strict father to spend a day at Cliffside-on-the-Hudson. . .

Ostentatiously Minnie and Frank left us alone.

I was devoutly praying that Frank would not make a break that would show me up for the amatory boaster I had been. . .

In addition to Minnie, I too had written . . avowing to Mera how lonely I was for a talk with her; and how I doubted my return to New York. I might, I averred in the letter, run up to Canada from Cliffside, and strike straight across to London from Montreal or Quebec, working my passage on a cattleboat . . this scheme I had never thought of before; I invented its details while my pen was on the paper. Then, from the fantasy of the fictive moment, I straightway, as was my wont, accepted it for a careful plan previously thought out:

"Somehow, it is you, above all people, that I wish to see before I go."

I must save the face of my idle and thoughtless boasting. . .

. . . . . .

But I soon discovered that Mera Harmer had a motive of her own for coming up to Cliffside to see me.

She was desperately love-sick for Allan Masson . . and she had figured that, since Allan and I were good friends, I might be able to convey certain information to her about him. . .

Putting her usual reserve aside because of the trouble in her heart:

"There was something I wanted to ask you so much about Allan —something that's been disturbing me a long while—that, when you wrote me you might not come back to the City again, I decided to come up."

"I'll answer anything you ask me about Allan, to the best of my ability, Mera."

"Do you—think—Allan has affairs?" her voice dwindled timidly while she asked the question.

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Aren't you friend enough to tell me?"

"He's a good-looking chap—he gallivants around a great deal, as you know . . how could he help—?"

She wished to know what she should do . . she couldn't help loving him, even though she considered him rather shallow. . . "Don't you consider him so?"

"Not more than the most of us," I answered, "but, look here, Mera—he's wanted you, hasn't he? and you've dandled him along, putting him off . . what else could you expect but that, if you wouldn't have him, others might?"

"Don't people"—(in the same dwindling voice)—"wait for each other—any more?"

"It's going out of fashion," I said brutally.

Then I pointed out the futility of her shadowy life among her faded literary associations, in her darkened studio where the tall candles burned. . .

"Why don't you let Allan wake you up to flesh-and-blood reality? . . it would do you good."

"It's not my nature. Besides, my father would kill me—literally, I think!"

"Have you read Freud?"

"No."

"—Freud would tell you that your father loves you himself,—by the manner of his savagely watching over your least step—would tell you that you, too, have a fixation on him!"

Her reaction was one of angry vexation. Her frail body trembled with emotion.

"What arrant nonsense you're capable of!

"You Freudians make me sick!

"Can't you conceive, simply, of a father afraid for his daughter, and only that?

"Father hates The Village . . says you're all a bunch of rotters with glib tongues . . doesn't wish me to see any of you—because of your theories, your manner of living."

"How about Frank and Minnie?"

"I've kept the knowledge from him that they're Villagers."

"And what's *your* downright opinion of us, Mera?"

"—My opinion? If you think it amounts to anything—I think you fool yourselves a lot . . but that, in the main, you're sincere . . and sincerity's two-thirds of the game of living——

"At least, for all your floundering-about, you're ALIVE!"

"And how about our being 'rotters'?" I felt hot under the collar at her father—he had been suavely courtly and affable to me and that seemed hypocritic.

"I said to Daddy he ought to be the last to speak in such a fashion of The Village—when he knows what actual utter rotters, and hypocrites to boot, the whole conventional world is, with scarcely the ghost of an ideal to point to when they prove weak and human!"

. . . . . .

"Mera, it seems to me the whole world of men and women are deplorably confused and mixed up by the rapid changes in modern life——

"But, though they blunder and make more mistakes than they'll admit, as you said to your father—the Radical crowd's at least gamely trying to face and bring to some honest conclusion the sexual problems that molest our peace of heart and of mind and of soul. . .

"That's why—though I'm a poor specimen—I still call myself a Radical . . and that's why I hate the Bourgeoisie."

"—A poor specimen?" I had made that remark with such heat, about myself, that it evoked the foregoing echoing query from her. . .

"Yes, Mera, a damned poor specimen . . Mera, I have a confession to make——

"I brought you up here as a mere matter of casual vanity—under a false, caddish pretense. I've inadvertently and vaingloriously let the implication get by to our friends, that you and I are—lovers!"

She took it quite calmly. She shrugged her shoulders and smiled. . .

"Well, we're even . . for all I came up for, was to learn from

you the truth about Allan Masson . . but I do hope you'll set Frank and Minnie right—about us!"

. . . . . .

"But you're really going to London for a literary season?—that much is true, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's true . . after vainglorying a year about it, I'm really going to London."

"Johnny, you scalawag—you'll be quite lonesome over there at first. . .

"I've been there, and I know.

"The English are at first a difficult nation—a difficult people, to meet—they're rather 'offish.' But it's shyness, not a cold nature . . they're maligned as to that . . but there's an enormous wall of reserve you'll have first to break through . .

"And, in the process of breaking through—you'll almost perish of loneliness."

"The social nature of the English is not going to worry me," I was saying what came into my head first— "The Library in the British Museum will be enough for me—and the old literary landmarks where England's great poets lived and died."

"Don't be silly. You'd shrivel up and die without people to talk to, boast before," she slyly teased. . .

On the way back to the house from our walk afield she remarked meditatively,

"I wonder if I dare!"

"—Wonder if you dare—what?"

"If I dare give you a letter of introduction to a friend of mine over there—to a very beautiful girl."

"Oh, please do, Mera!" I cried very eagerly.

She laughed.

"I thought the British Museum would be enough, and the old literary landmarks where England's great poets lived and died?"

I grumbled at being made fun of.

Mera was in a rollicking humor I had never observed her to be in before.

"I think I'll chance it. Emily will be safe enough. She never cared for men, when I knew her."

"She might have changed since. They often do," I answered playfully.

"Every woman cares, when the right man comes along. But I'm sure you wouldn't be her type.

"She'll be just what you need . . a good woman friend, who will, however, stand for none of your foolishness."

. . . . . .

"Since I've begun to know you and see beneath your bluster and naïve brag, I've learned to esteem you less and like you better," averred Mera, "—but I do wish that, outside of reading the poets none too critically and pottering away at the Classics, you'd strive to take larger advantage of, well, for want of a better phrase, your 'cultural opportunities'——

"There's the opera,—for instance, how many operas have you heard since you've been in New York?"

"I've had no money—it costs too much!"

"You might have purchased cheap tickets, for the gallery—instead of buying bottles of red and white wine at Renganeschi's, Maria's, Bertolloti's. . .

"And the theater—how many plays have you been to? . ."

I confessed that the only opera I had ever heard was "The Bohemian Girl," sung by a riff-raff company in Seattle, once, when I was on the bum there——

That, since I had sojourned in New York, I had attended three plays: *The Servant in the House* and that queer play of Strindberg's, *The Father* . . that Victor Ohland had produced . . and had seen Alla Nazimova as Norah. . .

"Yet—can't you see for yourself? you talk of music as if you knew all about it . . and of playwrighting, as if the destinies of the English-speaking drama rested in your hands."

"But I've read whole libraries—and every time I go to visit the Danforths,—they have a heap of Red Seal records there that I play over and over again——

"I've heard Caruso, that way . . and Scotti . . and Farrar . . and . . and—" I faltered.

"How stale! you ought to be ashamed of yourself!

"You're right, going to London—you need to wrench yourself

entirely and bodily out of everything you've ever known and seen! . .

"I could almost weep for you!"

The intense, feeling sincerity of her voice swept me out of myself——

"Oh," I cried desperately, "I wish I could die—I wish to God I could jump clear off to another star."

. . . . . .

After I had seen Mera off to Town——

"So—she backed down?"—Grayson joked.

Minnie put in instantly—"Frank, stop being vulgar."

"No—Frank—Minnie——

"She didn't 'back down,' as you phrase it, Frank——

"You see—I'm a rotter—I—I——"

Stumblingly, and with salutary humiliation I explained the true relation between us. . .

. . . . . .

"London—at last"—my voice rose to a chant—"I'm going to London!"

"How'll you get there," again insistently asked Grayson, "when you haven't the fare?"

"I have a scheme—a wonderful, spectacular scheme!

"I'll pick out the biggest liner afloat that's sailing for England . . and I'll just walk aboard, first class!"

"This is the craziest idea you've broached yet!"

"No; it's quite practical. I'll take advantage of the Caste System, you see.

"In the First Cabin they don't collect tickets, I've heard, till everybody's settled down to the first meal in the saloon—or later——"

"How'll you make it up the gangplank to the First Cabin?"

"If a fellow looks at all presentable, they won't stop his going aboard. . .

"It's different in the Second and Third Cabins—but in the First Cabin they're polite for fear of offending some one who is SOMEBODY!"

"And then?"

"Once aboard, I'll just stay aboard."

"Where did you learn how to turn this trick?"

"From a reporter friend of mine who once covered ship-news."

It had been Ally Merton who had imparted me the information. . .

"By Jiminy, that *would* be exciting!"

. . . . . .

"But how about meeting the people over on the other hill? and how about your projected play—plays?"

"I'll see those people . . then, if I don't succeed in writing a worthwhile play—I'll walk aboard the liner after the manner I've told—and try a change of venue."

. . . . . .

Valid ideas would not muster for my poetic drama.

Through the body of the succeeding week I sat there in Graysaxe, alone, wishing I were dead; not really meaning the wish. . .

Not yet come to the realization of the rich, fantastic life I had been living, it seemed to me that the worth and reality of life were passing me by.

Having left my thirtieth birthday behind by two years, I might no longer furbish up my youth for my excuse of promising everything and doing practically nothing.

"Maybe I'd better tear up my lyric manuscript, quietly hop a freight, and disappear back into trampdom," I cried to myself erratically.

This was far from my meaning, too.

"Suicide!"

That meant enjoying the luxury of what the papers would say—or would I be able to look back from The Other Side and enjoy it? . .

I meant suicide least of all.

. . . . . .

"I've arranged your meeting with the Broadway people. To-night we're invited to dine at Arthur Stahl's," spoke Frank Grayson, "so put on your best necktie and your best manners and we'll soon hike over there."

"Maybe no necktie and no manners would go best among the journeymen in the outer courts of the Temple," I replied, irritated at the not ill-meant, but maladroit levity of my friend. . .

"—Spoken with all the uneasy arrogance of the priest remiss in his duties WITHIN the Temple!"

I had not expected that sally from Minnie, hitherto my champion . . it was not like her. But she was more sticking up for Frank, in the zest of renewed love for him, than clinching his phrase into an affront. . .

For, detecting the angry yet miserable look in my face,——

"Forgive me, Johnny!" she placatively interjected, touching my shoulder gently—"your description of the majority of Broadwayites is less than severe, but I'll speak for Jane Chevering to the contrary:

"She's a good feminist, a woman of high intelligence:

"She was the first to produce and act in the poetic plays of Hilary Worthington in this country. . .

"And to-night you'll meet another—a man—over there—an actor-manager who's trying to do in New York something similar to the Grand Guignol in Paris."

"You mean Horace Glynn?"

I then truly acknowledged what a pleasure it would be for me to meet these two who were distinctly not "journeymen" in the outer courts of the Temple of Art. . .

. . . . . .

As we drew near in the gathering twilight, Minnie's and Frank's friends were seen engaged on the tennis court: on one side of the net,—a round, merry, skirt-flouncing, fairish woman, and, with her, a tall, heavy-set, determined-looking man; on the other, a short, dumpy man who seemed to coast rather than run, and a tall, elegant handsome chap who moved with the grace of a ballet when he ran up to the flying ball: they were, in the order described: Flora Minturn, author of "Where's My Baby?"; her partner, Horace Glynn, sponsor of the American Grand Guignol movement; the short, dumpy man was Arthur Stahl, who had written the recent Broadway success, "The Other Chair," and was the husband of the well-known actress, Jane Chevering; the tall, graceful chap who balleted after the ball, was the actor-producer Lucian Wolter, husband of Flora Minturn.

Wolter waved his racket to us, seeing us coming up, as did likewise the stout, dumpy Stahl, who called out— "Wait till we finish this set, Grayson," then trying to be lightly allusive to me—"Take

the poet over to the sidelines and introduce him to my wife . . Jane has always had a soft spot for poets."

The game went on, while we crossed the close-clipped grass to where Jane Chevering sat.

I felt puffed up over being among important people, though they were important but in the popular and successful sense. And I felt inwardly ashamed of myself for feeling puffed up.

Jane Chevering, sitting there on a bench in her modified Greek dress-reform costume, put me at ease by her resemblance to the women of the Village, and by the thoughtful conversation she straightway engaged in, with me, about poetry. There was a calm light of intellectual power, a spiritual composure, in her face, that I liked. . .

While Frank and Minnie stepped apart to watch the game in progress, Jane Chevering's simple friendliness led me to talk of myself, of my work . . of my blank verse tragedy, and, especially, of my romantic play in rhyme. . .

"A play in rhymed couplets . . I think I'd rather like to act in one."

"Dryden wrote successful rhymed plays, in his day . . I don't see why one shouldn't go over now."

"I'd like to see your verse play—have you any in the manuscript —any with you?"

No, I hadn't, it was still but a mental concept, I confessed . . then, she averred, I must diligently set to work, and, some week-end soon, bring over at least a scene, if not a first act, for her to see. . .

I said I would, my heart rising optimistically to the vision of fame and success that waked full-born, at her encouraging words. . .

. . . . . .

Arthur Stahl came bounding up, the final game ended—squat, swart, pursy-cheeked . . puffing windily from exertion . . excessively blowing out his thick, red lips, his chopped moustache riding windily a-top. . .

He looked me over whimsically, with vague, blue eyes; he masked a world of keen observation behind their vague blueness, and behind his perpetual banter. . .

"Well, poet! How are you getting on with Miss Chevering?"

and, without waiting, he turned to his wife, ragging—"Well, Jane, you ought to be happy; you've got another poet in tow . . here's your chance to go in for drama with a big D again!"

Giving him a look of gentle, large rebuke and turning to me, Jane Chevering interpreted——

"My husband's alluding to the regard and admiration I had for Hilary Worthington, when he was over here,—and to the several poetic plays of his I've put on."

While Stahl continued his bantering vein,—disliking him, I was wondering what an intelligent, attractive woman like Jane Chevering had ever found in him. . .

The rest came strolling up. . .

"Let's go into the house," Flora Minturn suggested; "it's cocktail hour."

. . . . . .

The silent Japanese servant, impersonally obsequious, passed the tray of cocktails about.

While I sipped my first one, I sized up my surroundings.

The house reeked with comforts.

It was tastefully furnished, but everything was new, as if brought together through recent success.

. . . . . .

I had been telling them rather amusingly of the struggles of a poet . . not meaning to be amusing,—but naïve touches unconsciously added by me, here and there, made what I said seem amusing, to the sophisticated interpretations of my hearers. . .

Arthur Stahl spoke up banteringly, addressing his wife——

"It's easy to see that Gregory needs a patron,—why don't you take him under your wing, Jane?"

It was "easy to see" that Jane Chevering's previous acting in Worthington's plays had stuck in her husband's craw; and he was venting his dislike and irk of her inclination toward the poetic drama by continual kidding——

She answered him, blandly serious——

"I don't think it would be amiss for Mr. Gregory's genius to find a patron . . some one like the Irish noblewoman who took Willie Yeats under her protection, and saw to it that his inspirations were cherished, that, every morning, after breakfast, there was a

quiet room waiting him to write in, with pencils sharpened and a desk in order!"

But Stahl would not let up——

"Assume the rôle, Jane. . and he might write a play in which you could play the beautiful princess."

"That would be better than forever playing the old woman in your 'Other Chair,'" she rebuked, with a flash of sharp spirit that, however, she as quickly subdued. . .

. . . . . .

I began to talk about the poetic drama . . and how there had been, until the day before yesterday in literature, no other but the poetic drama.

As I spoke of the great majesty of the Greek Dramatists . . of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides . . of the imitative but robust Latins . . of the succeeding poetic drama of Italy, France, Spain, —I grew really eloquent in my sincerity . . I leaped up, moving back and forth in my excitement, when I got to the Elizabethans . . ending by quoting Perkin Warbeck's lines in contempt of death, from John Ford's play.

Wings seemed to be all about me, carrying me up. . .

Then—the drop came. I grew quite terrified at these silent human beings sitting about, giving me all their attention . . silent and mysterious in their bodies . . that hidden mysteriousness in everybody that I couldn't ever get at——

Embarrassed and feeling inferior, I shifted my words to a scatter of voluble, self-conscious boastfulness. . .

"So I'm going to write a great poetic play, that will make the rubber-stamp playwrights and hacks of Broadway sit up and take notice!"

Jane Chevering, looking at me steadfastly, gave an involuntary sigh of sad concern. . .

Arthur Stahl assumed an expression of slightly amused and puzzled irritation. . .

Lucian Wolter looked bored; Horace Glynn turned a face of blank astonishment toward me . . Flora Minturn showed sympathetic pity in her eyes; Frank and Minnie were obviously chagrined. . .

"Come here, boy, and sit down by me," Jane Chevering commanded, after an awkward silence——

Frank and Minnie tried to start a general conversation, while the Japanese servant, smiling as at something far away, passed the tray again. . .

"My dear boy," Jane Chevering asked, in a low, conversational voice, "why didn't you keep to the subject you knew about? . . you were talking beautifully. Why did you have to start inveighing against Broadway?"

"Because Broadway's a sham." I lifted my voice argumentatively, focusing attention on myself again.

"Broadway is nothing more nor less than the playground of the people—when it makes literary and artistic pretensions they are mostly false—a sham—if that is what you mean . . but——"

"But you shouldn't attack *us*," put in Horace Glynn,—"myself, for instance . . I'm putting on one-act plays of high literary interest and excellence—and, incidentally, I fear, failing with them, there being no widespread demand for such qualities in the theater of to-day——"

"Failing?" I cried back, "good! . . you ought to keep on failing; it will be better for your soul, instead of selling it by going in for spiritual prostitution——"

"Look at Flora, there!" called Stahl, amused, and blowing his moustache up, as one blows up a feather. . .

"Spiritual prostitution! that's a good one! . .

"Hey, Flora, do you know you're a spiritual prostitute?"

I was embarrassed.

Flora Minturn turned to me, her smile at Stahl's raillery fading out——

"Mr. Gregory . . I don't pretend to literature . . when I wrote my farce 'Where's My Baby?' I was living in a hall bedroom—as poor as you are, but without the name and friends you have . . I deliberately wrote my play—for money! and it's still making money . . an incredible amount of it . . it's clean . . it's well-written, also deliberately written for Broadway . . and I'm not ashamed of it, Mr. Gregory.

"You must not condemn me,—you must learn not to condemn

other people—for not having the idealism of the poet who is willing to die in his attic, in order to leave a few great lines of song, of purest power and inspiration——

"For that is the highest artistic ideal, I confess!"

"Good God, Flora Minturn—Mrs. Wolter—I don't condemn you!" I cried, in such a deep voice of contrition that a gale of laughter swept the group. . .

A melodious three-toned gong was tapped by the Japanese boy and we rose, released from the tension,—friendly, chatting, and proceeded in to dine.

. . . . . .

"In many respects, Mr. Gregory's right about Broadway," affirmed Jane Chevering, "—why can't we be honest enough with him—and with ourselves—to acknowledge it?"

"Let him and his kind do something better, then."

"That's not an answer—not a rebuttal."

"Oh, of course," cried Stahl ironically, "on Broadway, everybody's venal . . and everything's commercial and sordid . . and all plays are stolen bodily or plagiarized, or rewritten by the producer, with the poor author pushed ignominiously aside . . and every woman has to pay the price—and—and—" he spluttered angrily, now,—his moustache riding high. . .

"Arthur, don't be rude to a guest!" his wife rebuked, "we all know there's quite enough of exactly the things you enumerate to justify, in a qualified sense, some of Mr. Gregory's denunciations."

"No, Jane, I'll be damned if there is!" shouted Stahl.

"There's Leonard Grassmer," I shouted back in return—"Leonard Grassmer, an ex-circus performer, a peanut vendor before that,—who dominates you all with his fraudulent and ludicrous affectation of pontifical and esoteric dramatic qualities——"

"Now! now! Mr. Gregory!" Jane Chevering protested severely and justly, "suppose *you* should become a leading literary man, a famous playwright—and people should say, speaking in unfair contempt of you, 'ex-tramp,' 'ex-jailbird'?"

"But I—I have some culture—some knowledge . . even if I do say it of myself."

"Grassmer has his cultural limitations, of course . . and he makes a show of himself when he pretends above them . . but there's

no one in the world who can direct like him . . in that respect he's pure genius."—Horace Glynn.

"And there's no one like him in the dramatic world for his power over people, his ability to mold and shape actors," added Flora Minturn.

"Yes," put in Lucian Wolter quietly, unconsciously posing his profile with the faultless handsomeness of a movie hero in a close-up, "you've accused the producer, generally, of vulgarity—of treating actors like so much cattle, flesh on the hoof——

"Some are pretty bad, I'll admit—some rough-necks of the old school——

"But Grassmer, in his intensest moments of directing, never goes beyond a gentle and exquisite courtesy——

"Anybody who has any contact with him in the theater swears by him!"

"But you people are taking everything I say, in a personal sense . . even when I speak of an individual like Grassmer, using him as a type. . .

"You're trying to make the theater an enclosed domestic thing, a family affair limited to one small group of individuals, on one noisy, glittering street."

"Which family and which glittering street you only know by hearsay."

"You're dominated by the trinity of Sure-Fire, Hokum and Happy Ending!" I exclaimed scornfully. . .

"I tell you what, Gregory," Wolter burst out, "you write us that rhymed, romantic play you've been talking about, and I'll produce it for a couple of matinées, to begin with—then, if there's anything to it——"

"And I'll play the leading woman for you," Jane Chevering assured me.

"My wife to the rescue!" commented Arthur Stahl, imitating the sound of a galloping horse, with his hands strumming on the table . . with a fond smile, this time,—not caustically . . to be rewarded by a fond smile in return, from his wife. . .

"Do you really mean"—to Wolter—"that you'll produce my play? and you'll take the lead?"—to Jane Chevering.

"Yep. Nobody's kidding now . . they really mean it," Stahl affirmed.

"Then, inside of two weeks from to-night, I'll be over here, with the first act, complete,—and read it to you."

Flora Minturn offered the additional observation——

"I don't see why a good, romantic play, rhymed, shouldn't make a sort of success, from its very oddity."

. . . . . .

On our way back to Grayson's house, I walked quietly, thoughtfully, for a space, with Minnie and Frank . . then, intoxicated with the idea of success and fame opening in a vista before me, I began to leap and caper grotesquely, . . clapping Minnie and Frank on the back, and shouting——

"Hurray! Hurray! I always knew if I could only reach the ear of some one in power, I could put a big play over!"

"But you have not written a single scene of that play yet— I'll bet you don't even know what you're going to write about!"

"Yes, I do . . but, if I didn't, I could soon think up something . . my imagination teems with great plays . . all I needed was—some actuality like this—to enable me to put it over! . ."

"But what about your trip to England—your literary season in London?"

"I haven't meant to give that up—but now I'll go as a famous playwright and *pay* my way first class!"

. . . . . .

The coffee I consumed, and the fierce, black draughts of tea I consumed, in copious quantities, the ensuing week—alone—at Graysaxe, turned me into a bundle of jumps and nerves. . .

Still, except for a few lines that stood apart as fair lyric bursts —my rhymed, romantic play, "The Triumph of Youth," would not come. . .

At last I thrust it aside, though carefully treasuring the few lines to be worked over for magazine fillers.

. . . . . .

Then the Noisy, Glittering Street took hold on me——

"By God! . . just this once . . I'll do them one of their sappy, conventional plays . . rake in money by heaps, as they do . . then, after my trip to London, I'll wind up at Capri or somewhere

else in Italy, and the rest of my life, write sonnets and lyrics with no regard for anything but my severe, classic fame . . self-subsidized. . .

"And never yield to their commercial temptations again!"

My pen, taking to the new idea, plied rapidly at "The Ring of Three Wishes" . . a thing of deliberate treacle . . the story, in brief——

The tale of a young man and woman in love, who could never, somehow, find themselves alone . . at a house-party. . .

The young man—the hero—was an archæologist by profession, who had dug among the ruins on the site of ancient Nineveh . . and had therein unearthed a slight ring of pale, curious metal which he at present wore on his little finger. . .

The girl—the heroine—admiring the ring—he slipped it on her middle finger, a gift. . .

Just when they think themselves safe from observation at last, and start to become emotional, the party Bore appears. . .

The girl, irritably twisting the ring on her finger and making the intense wish that they might be alone, like Adam and Eve, with no one else in the world—the party Bore disappears like a puff of vapor, and there appears before the astonished young couple a strange being, raimented in sky-color, who proves to be the spirit of an old Babylonian astrologist.

He tells them that the ring that they have is a magic one he wore long ago . . and that it has power to summon him up, when so turned on the finger of the wearer——

"It is 'The Ring of Three Wishes,' the first of which I am here to grant—have indeed, granted. . .

"For you have your wish—you are now alone, like Adam and Eve, in the world."

But there is one thing the spirit of the astrologer has no power to do—he cannot restore the primal innocence of Adam and Eve. . .

Boredom sets in; the two, missing other companionship, soon begin to get on each other's nerves. . .

In a moment of irritation, the girl, twisting the ring, wishes for other human companionship—"for even the Party Bore"—who, of course, comes to make a third. . .

Rivalry now ensues between the bore and the hero . . the two

lock in deadly combat . . the girl, frightened, twists the ring, making the third and last wish— "That life may become the same as it was before the first wish."

Immediately the two lovers wake from their dream . . still at the house party . . the rest of the party crowd in . . even the appearance of the Bore is welcomed. . .

Pleased with every-day life and welcoming all its vicissitudes, they announce their engagement. . .

. . . . . .

In writing this dreadful thing the freshness and originality of my Muse forsook me. My verbiage turned out to be worse than my Bohn Classical Library translation. . .

In four days the play was done—all four acts of it. . .

When Frank and Minnie put in their appearance for the week-end, they commented on my more than usually drawn appearance, asking me what I had been doing to myself——

My hand shaking like a drug fiend's from the effects of continual tea and coffee stimulation, I answered——

"What have I been doing? why, I've been stoking up on tea and coffee and writing a play that will sweep the country!"

While they sat patiently, and listened, I read the play to them.

. . . . . .

I had finished reading. I looked up at my friends, while the fire crackled, spreading a grateful heat——

"Well, what do you think of it? Isn't it pretty good?" I asked proudly.

"—Great stuff!" cried Frank, enthusiastic and uncritical where I, as a writer, was concerned . . he knew me . . that was enough. Too many good friends are like that. . .

But Minnie, ordinarily full of twenty enthusiasms at once, was, in this instance, impartial. . .

"It's rotten! It's horrible!" she ejaculated uncontrollably.

"Minnie, you're 'way off! I think it's big stuff," reiterated Frank.

"Thanks, Frank!" I said, "for your appreciation. . ." Then, turning to Minnie, foolishly hurt, I continued, "I think you're 'way off, too!"—a bit ungracefully. . .

"This is Saturday . . take me over to see Miss Chevering to-morrow night, with it,—will you, Frank?"

"You bet I will!" Frank was glowing with enthusiasm.

"—Better sleep on it . . don't drink any more coffee or tea to-day . . when you wake Sunday morning, with a clear mind, read it over again, forgetting you wrote it yourself—and you'll see I was right!" begged Minnie.

. . . . . .

I kept off tea and coffee . . my nerves were too tensely wound up to dare take more. I slept jumpily . . guiltily . . knowing that, at the best, if the play were any good, The Glittering Street had caught me, like the others. . .

I couldn't wait the dawn. . . I jumped clear out of sleep, lit the lamp, re-read the play. . .

Minnie was right. IT WAS AWFUL!

I hurried into the sitting-room and cast the entire rapidly scribbled manuscript into the sinking embers of the fire, waking a brief light that sent shadows dancing and lurching about the room, and, dying down, brought them back to the womb of the darkness whence they came. . .

"I'm a God-damned fool . . whirling about like a crazy squirrel in a cage—I've played myself clean out—I need a change of venue. . .

"I'm going to take that trip—or commit suicide."

. . . . . .

In the morning I rose early before Minnie and Frank were out of bed, they sleeping late like honeymooners——

Leaving a hurried note, in which I admitted Minnie was right about my dreadful play and committing my trunkful of possessions to Frank's care, I made off for the City. . .

The only thing I brought with me besides the clothes I walked in was a mss. volume and carbon copy of my poems, "Youth Calls."

. . . . . .

Rapidly I gathered up the strings of my friendships, running about and importantly saying good-by.

When I outlined again my scheme of a jump to London, Whellen laughingly observed that he had heard the story before, but that,

if I really meant to do it, it might be worth while . . it would be good publicity for my book of poems, which I should leave with him to look over . . of course the book would have to have a certain standard of excellence . . and then, too, there was that hundred he had advanced me, in an off moment. . .

He rose, dapper, the fresh-cut flower in his buttonhole,—hand-shaking in farewell and wishing me good luck! . .

I was my reintegrated self again. My adventure, determined upon, was making me over. . .

Ally Merton, when he saw I was serious, said it reminded him of the old days "before New York got me," and he gave me the information that one of the biggest boats in the world, *The Transatlantic*, was sailing for Plymouth, Southampton and Cherbourg within two days. . .

"That's the boat I'm looking for—the biggest!"

All I would need do would be nonchalantly to walk up the First Class gangway; it was after I gave myself up the fun would begin, he warned . . those were the days when passports were not required. . .

Merton's straight, calm look into my eyes silently dared me make good——

"Of course I'm to get the exclusive story for my paper?"

"That goes without saying, Ally . . and, Ally, you've been a mighty good friend to me——"

He waved my appreciation aside. . .

"I hope you find in London the right environment for your genius, at last.

"Your friends, ever since I've known you, have always been expecting great things of you . . things which somehow don't come off——

"Maybe you ought to find some nice girl—marry—settle down—work steadily at some semi-literary job——

"—Produce your verse and plays on the side——"

"No, Ally, that would smother the last spark in me——

"What I need's continual excitement, like this. . .

"Adventure . . crowds . . interviews. . .

"I think I'll inaugurate a new art, Ally,—an art that has never been named, but always *has been* . . Paracelsus practiced and knew

it . . and Giordano Bruno . . and Alexander . . and Cæsar . . and Napoleon . . to mention names at random. . .

"And, in the present age, Teddy Roosevelt has it down pat——

"And Count Tolstoy——

"And Gabriel d'Annunzio——

"The Art of Spectacularism!"

"You mean—*showing off?*"

"There you go,—being cynical!

"I mean exactly what I said . . the Art of Spectacularism . . the world demands it . . it needn't keep a fellow from producing the goods in his own creative work . . instead, it ought to help him, supply him, indirectly, with an audience when he has some work to show!"

"As I understand it, then, you're going to continue your practice of the new-named art, two days from now, at noon (that's her sailing time) on the *Transatlantic?*"

"You can have the story in before that."

"I prefer to see you on shipboard first."

"What? You doubt me, Ally?"

Caustic friendliness shown in his eyes——

"You've proclaimed so many performances, Johnny,—seeing's believing!"

. . . . . .

The gentlemanly, quiet-voiced Tanner, of the *Elite* (whom I saw as a friend, in preference to Selfridge) was quite the dolefullest about the outcome of my forthcoming adventure——

"Don't do it! Stay home and write . . I'll find you a cottage free, from a friend of mine, up on Schroon Lake. . .

"You can't imagine how bitterly inhospitable a foreign country can be—England especially, if you have no connections there! . ."

Jack Miles, of *Manton's*, thought it a great idea—advised me by all means to go in for the stunt. . .

"It'll do you good . . blow the winds of change through you . . you've grown stale, milling about——

"Send us an occasional poem, and we'll be glad to buy it."

Miles and I ended up by wrestling all over the office. . .

"You may have been a rough-and-ready hobo," he breathed

heavily, boasting boyishly, "but I was a bouncer, once, in a San Francisco water-front saloon."

. . . . . .

Mera Harmer presented me with a letter of introduction to her beautiful friend, Emily Sachon, in London.

"She'll see that you behave yourself, over there, and, at the same time, do not become too lonely for a friend."

. . . . . .

Allan Masson grandly gave me a farewell dinner which he cooked himself . . moving about in his monk's gown. . .

He was soon going into a lay retreat connected with a High Church Monastery—going on *his* adventure, as I, on *mine*, he avowed.

His table was set ecclesiastically . . great, tall, white candles gleaming along the board.

He had invited Mera Harmer, and Randall O'Liam and his wife . . and Llewellyn Sprat was there—his English newspaper friend, —the short, slight young man wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, who suavely condemned American newspaper ethics in contradistinction to the ethics of the English Press.

"So you're going to London, old chap?"

"Yes—how do you think I'll get along over there?"

"The English—my people—they'll receive you with open minds—they'll think it's quite sporting!"

"But, remember, Mr. Sprat"—I recollected that he was a rival reporter, "in on the know"—"remember the story's promised to Merton first!"

"—On my word of honor!" asseverated Sprat. . .

. . . . . .

Daddy Trotter was sorry to see me go:

"It ain't because you got no more money, boy, is it?—that you're doin' a stunt like that, is it? If that's the reason—don't you worry —just stay on in New York . . your credit at old Daddy Trotter's is good till the judgment day, boy!"

The big negro cook assured me, in grandiloquently correct English, that he'd keep all the clippings from the papers about me. . .

. . . . . .

The night before the day on which I walked aboard the *Transatlantic*, Lilla Matthewson held a party in my honor at her place on Fifteenth Street. . .

I loved the excitement I was creating, the attention I was calling to myself. . .

All the bunch were there: Junius Alverson, Vera Williams, Hall Mandreth, Minnie Saxe, Frank Grayson, Jim Benders, Jessie Cummins, Harry Parnell, Big Joe Oakman and others. . .

The one person I missed—we all missed—was Janice Godman. . .

. . . . . .

"Good luck, Johnny."

"Bon voyage."

—Said Jack Matthewson, confidentially, at the door—"come around for me, early in the morning—you'll need a friend to go to the dock with you . . it will be better than going off alone. . .

"I think it will be a great stunt. . .

"Wish I had the guts to do something similar . . but, truth is, all of us fall into a rut—"

"All right, Jack, I'll be around for you at ten o'clock."

. . . . . .

"Gemma Donne,—you've never let me kiss you . . now give me a kiss good-by."

She did—an exquisite kiss. . .

"My dear boy—that cap!" she laughed, "you can't wear that rowdy thing—they wouldn't let you aboard. . ."

"I'm not wearing it—I'm carrying it in my pocket."

"You'll have to have one on your head—and a good one—not to arouse suspicion."

"Where am I to find one? I can't afford to buy a new one . . I'm broke." Which was true, except that Llewellyn Sprat had given me a shilling, facetiously, so that I "wouldn't land, broke."

"I've just sold a sketch . . here's three dollars . . you can buy a fair cap—a sort of yachting cap, with that . . to make yourself look nifty . . as you walk past the man at the gangplank . . such people have observing eyes!" said Gemma.

Next morning, I bought the cap, or rather, Jack Matthewson selected one for me. . .

Then he and I, we took a taxi, at his expense, to a side-street

near the docks, where we dropped off and he took me into a saloon. . .

"Come on; you've an hour yet . . have a couple of cocktails to heighten your nerve."

"Only two . . I must keep my wits clear."

I detected a glint in Jack's eye . . if he could but make me wabbly . . have me miss the boat . . just for fun . . was it that that I read in his glance? No, it was not that, but a serious intention to put me in the condition where I would be unable to go aboard, because, pondering, he had arrived at the conclusion that what I was about to do was a waste of effort, a foolish act that would not solve a single problem. . .

I started impatiently out at the swinging half-door. . .

"Wait a minute—there's time for just one more."

"Not on your life . . what are you trying to do to me, Jack?

"Come on, if you're going to see me off . . Merton's waiting for me there now, I know."

. . . . . .

There was the usual seething excitement and bustle at the dock . . groups of people surging about . . electric automatic trucks scurrying hither and thither piled with trunks and be-labeled baggage . . men riding upright upon them and guiding them deftly through mazes of other baggage to be taken aboard. . .

There were the great funnels lying back, a-slant . . the smoke beginning to breathe upward . . vociferous passengers and friends crowding dock and deck. . .

"Good-by, Jack."

"Good-by, Johnny, and good luck!"

I resolutely strode up the gangway leading to the First Class deck, trying to look superior and disengaged, under one arm a copy of *Manton's Magazine*, in my hand a volume of the poetry of Robert Herrick. . .

I made it easily past the two men that stood at the bottom of the First Class gangway, and past the single officer at the top . . was not even scrutinized, thanks to the yachting cap. . .

. . . . . .

Ally Merton appeared . . I saw him coming along with his meticulously short yet determined steps. . .

It was a pleasure to me to watch him searching more and more disbelievingly for me . . thridding the crowd, up and down the deck. . .

It was not until he appeared again; crestfallen because he was sure he had been taken in—at the top of the gangplank, about to descend and depart; it was not till then that I called out to him triumphantly——

"Hey there! Ally!"

He turned at the call, his eyes searching for me. Seeing me, his face dawned with a spreading smile . . he hurried back, and up to me:

"So you're really going through with it?"

"Yes, I'm going through with it . . I'm sick of the half-life I've been living.

"You know what the New Testament says about 'being born again'?

"Well, in London, I'm going to 'be born again.'"

The call came for all visitors ashore. . .

"Good-by, Johnny."

"Good-by, Ally!"

A new mood came over Ally: turning, his farewell words were—that he wouldn't be in my shoes for a thousand dollars . . muttering something about the stokehole on the way over, and jail and deportation when I reached my destination. . .

As I watched his meticulous but determined steps carrying him off, I noticed that he was laughing to himself visibly, or, rather, curiously tittering. . .

. . . . . .

The *Transatlantic* began to cast loose—to swing out a-stream. . .

A cold, momentary scare swept over me . . there was yet time for me to leap back to the dock. . .

"Don't commit this folly," a cravenness bade, inside me:

"Danforth, the good Danforth,—he's your friend,—he will help you till you get on your feet . . jump back to the dock . . go to him. . ."

But I saw what a laughing-stock I would make of myself, if I backed down at this late hour——

And I knew for a certainty that I must find a complete divorce

from my past futilities of living . . which I would go back to as certainly, if it were not for something drastic like this. . .

Then, augmenting the cheers and the waving of handkerchiefs, the ship's band struck up. And my egotism came to the fore, and it seemed that that band was playing solely for me.

I stood against the rail, erect, like a commanding general.

Curiously exalted by the thought of what the newspapers would say, the stir I would make; as the boat drifted out into the Hudson, I waved a triumphant good-by to Ally Merton and to Jack Matthewson who had found each other and were discussing me with animation.

THE END

(Continued from front flap)

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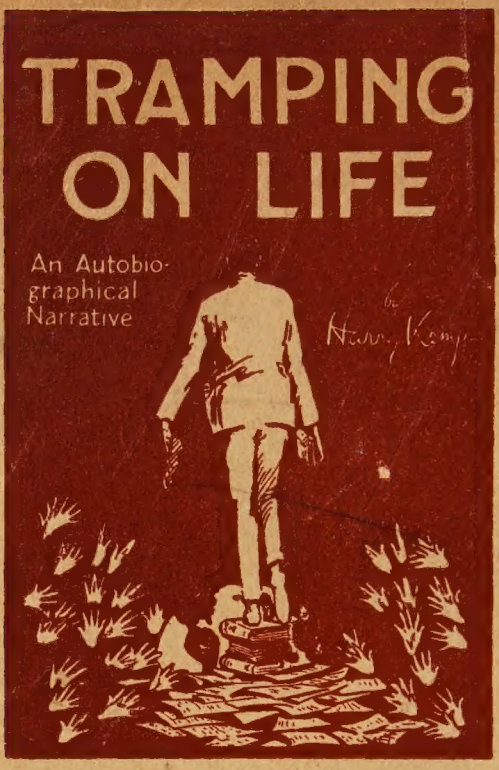

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